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["CAN WE HAVE SHELTER FOR A LITTLE WHILE?" ASKED KATE HERriot, IN SWEET BUT DECIDED TONES.]

AN EVIL DEED.

CHAPTER I.

THE OLD MINE HOUSE.

ONE cold October evening the wind was amusing itself grandly, doing great damage in all parts of our fair, little England; blowing down stout walls; knocking over chimney pots as easily as nine pins, and felling the tallest trees to the ground, there to lie helpless, shorn of all their majesty. But most that gloomy night did the mischievous blast seem to frolic through the shadowy gullies and lonely deserted, mines on Dartmoor, sweeping over the crests of the lichen-covered rocks, transforming the lazy ripples of the placid streams into turbulent waves; creeping 'twixt the clumps of trees and shrubs with a strange, doleful whisper.

A fearful night it was, a night that evil-doers would love—a night whereon to do ill deeds. The wind swept on and found a very quiet dismal spot wherein to play its pranks—

the old orchard surrounding the half ruined mine house of Tordale. A habitation lying far away from other dwelling places, a low built, sinister looking abode with small diamond-paned windows, through which the daylight found it hard to penetrate.

Folks about there were wont to say that the inhabitants suited the house. And certainly as they sat by the table in the old rambling kitchen that night they were not very prepossessing to look at. A mighty fire blazed in the old grate, and showed that the occupants of the room were two in number—a man of about thirty years, and a woman a little younger.

They were singularly alike in looks; there was no mistaking the fact that they were brother and sister. The same hard grey eyes, heavy features, thin, cruel lips, and coarse, receding chin. They had taken the old house at a low rent some months before, and had settled down quietly in that gloomy spot.

Everyday the brother went to Plymouth—to business, he said, to anyone bold enough to ask him—but what that business was no one knew. All the information that could be

gathered amounted to this,—that they paid their small rent regularly, and that their name was Parker. With this scanty information the worthy though curious country folks were fain to be content.

The wind howled round the crazy house, but the two inside were talking too eagerly to notice it. The man, leaning his head on his hands, stared gloomily into the fire as he talked; the woman sat upright, a very scornful look on her hard face as she knitted rapidly at a coarse grey sock, her needles flashing brightly in the firelight as she moved them.

"It's all that abominable gambling!" she was saying fiercely, "but for that, Sam, we could get away quietly."

"I know that," he snarled. "What's the use of telling me old news?"

She was silent, evidently deeply thinking.

"Can't we get on board without Symons knowing?" she said, presently.

"No," shortly. "Some kind friend has told him we are going by the *Brooklyn*. He'll be there to have me arrested."

"You lost the money at billiards?"



"Yes, one hundred pounds. Symons means to have it too."

She sighed heavily.

"You can't get it from anywhere, I suppose, Sam?"

Her brother sprang up and glared at her angrily.

"Don't ask foolish questions," he said, rudely, striding up and down the room. "Shall I go and dig in the old mine for it, or seek it in the bed of yon brawling stream? No, we can't get off. I shall be seized for the debt."

"Yes, and in a week's time charged with forgery," put in the sister, coolly, watching him from under her bent brows.

With a deep, low curse he turned away to the casement, and stared gloomily out at the heavy black shadows around.

"We're an unlucky couple, Rachael," he said, presently. "To think that ruin stares us in the face! And all for the want of a beggarly hundred!"

"Beggari, but hard to get," remarked the sister, picking up a stitch she had dropped.

He ground his teeth fiercely, laughing a little creepy laugh.

"Faith! Rachael, were anyone to pass by the old house now, carrying that magic sum, I'd be sorry for them."

"So would I," said his sister, with an answering laugh; "but, unfortunately, in this attractive spot, Sam, visitors are—"

"Hush!" broke in Sam, holding up his hand. "I hear horses' hoofs! Who can it be at this time, and on such a night?"

The two faces grew very white as, in perfect silence, they listened to the approaching sound.

"Only two," muttered the man, rushing over to a cupboard in the wall, and taking from it a small pistol. "If they've come to take me off to gaol, I won't go without a struggle!"

The sister, certainly the bolder of the two, smiled contemptuously, as she looked at his pallid face and shaking fingers.

"I shall go and listen at the door," she muttered, and crept away into the dark old hall.

In five minutes she was back again, a relieved look on her face.

"Put away your pistol, Sam," she said, coolly. "Tis only two young girls riding on the little Moorland ponies."

Sam's face cleared. He hastily replaced his weapon and followed his sister as she went to answer the gentle summons at the door.

"Who is it? What do you want?" demanded Rachael, flinging wide the heavy door.

Sam lifted a lantern as she asked the question, and gazed furtively at the newcomers.

The girls had alighted from their ponies, and were standing hand clasped in hand, looking anxiously at the brother and sister.

The tall, slender figures were wrapped in heavy riding cloaks, close brown hoods encircled the two fair, high-bred faces; the large, calm, blue eyes, the straight, dark brows, and the pure flushed cheeks showing admirably against the dark setting of the hoods.

Their pretty, golden curls, all blown about by the boisterous wind, strayed lovingly across the white foreheads and streamed in all its glory over the thick cloaks.

"May we have shelter for a little while?" asked the eldest in sweet, decided tones. "We have lost our way and are faint and weary."

Rachael's answer would have been short and rude had not Sam at that minute pinched her arm—a signal she well knew. She looked up then and spoke in gentle, pitying tones.

"Of course you may!" she said, hospitably. "My brother and I are all alone, and have only rude accommodation at the best to offer; but what we have you are welcome to."

"Thank," said the girl, promptly, leading forward her silent sister. "We shall be glad to get away from the wind and the rain."

"I'll take the ponies to the shed," cried

Sam, genially. "Rachael, take the young ladies to the fire."

In wondering silence she led them in removed the great cloaks, and placed them in chairs close to the glorious fire.

"There, darling!" cried the elder girl, holding the younger one's hand in a tight clasp. "You are warmer now?"

She nodded in answer, and her sister, turning gravely to the silent young woman watching them, spoke a few words of explanation to her.

"My poor Maude is dumb, she cannot speak."

"Really!" stammered Rachael, feeling strangely uneasy, as she met the gentle, troubled gaze of the dumb girl's blue eyes. "You should not be out on such a night," she went on abruptly, a curious fear of coming evil stealing into her heart.

"We could not help ourselves," said the elder girl, gaily, as Rachael began to lay the table for supper. "We live at a little village beyond Tavistock, and we were anxious to get there to-night."

"But where did you come from?" said Rachael, kindly.

"From Plymouth. We went there yesterday on business for my father, and were returning to-day when the storm overtook us."

"And your business? Did you manage it?"

"Yes," said the girl, innocently, as she drew her sister to the table, "that is all right. But we should have returned by train. I'm afraid father will be cross when he hears we rode, but, you see, we are so accustomed to Moorland riding; and then, if Maude's pony had not fallen lame we should have been near Tavistock by now."

She looked up then, for the door opened and the young man entered with quick, light step and smiling face.

"Ah, my bag!" she cried, anxiously, seeing what he carried. "How careless of me to have it fastened to my saddle, seeing what it held."

A slight pressure from Maude's little hand stayed the too confiding girl.

Sam came forward and placed beside her a small leather bag and a flat, thin book.

"Your property is quite safe, miss," he hesitated, and the girl filled up the pause.

"My name is Heriot—Kate Heriot. Thank you for bringing me my bag and—and" with a tiny laugh, "my diary. I don't know why I brought it."

Sam smiled and talked away most pleasantly, while Rachael was away preparing a room for them.

They were tired out with their long, rough ride, and therefore delighted when the woman came back and led them to their fire-lit room.

"Get undressed," she said, softly. "I'll be up in a few minutes with some hot coffee. You'd like that?"

"Oh, yes, thanks!" cried Kate, gratefully, clasping Rachael's hand firmly, while in the other she held the little bag and her diary.

"How good you are to us!"

"Nonsense!" said the young woman, a queer look stealing into the hard eye. "I'm only doing my duty. There, get to bed quickly, and I'll bring the coffee."

For one minute her gaze lingered on the little shabby bag, then encountering the dumb girl's strange, intent gaze she shivered slightly, then left the room and ran down into the great, gloomy kitchen.

CHAPTER II.

THE FATAL MIXTURE.

HER brother was standing before the fire looking gravely, first at the steaming coffee-pot and then at a curiously-shaped little bottle he held in his hand.

"Sam," she said, coming close behind him and hissing her words into his ear, "the Venetian poison! What's that for?"

He started and almost dropped the bottle.

"Why do you come creeping in like a snake in the grass?" he growled, angrily.

"What is it for?" she repeated, calmly.

"I said I'd be sorry for anyone who, tonight possessing a hundred pounds, should cross my path, didn't I?" he asked, with a sinister glance from his grey eyes.

She nodded and lifted the coffee-pot.

"Those girls have it in that bag," he went on, whispering his words now.

"Are you speaking the truth?" she said, abruptly.

"Yes, I opened the bag in the shed. Just one hundred pounds in gold. While you were upstairs I made good use of my time. I found that the father is a man of good family but impoverished means. He and the mother are both ill—a tradesman presses for payment of a long-standing account. The girls went off to Plymouth to a rich old miser uncle and obtained the money from him."

"Well?" said Rachael, quietly, filling a cup with a steady hand.

"Well, he echoed, "I mean to have that money, and this little bottle shall help me to it! Our foreign mother did one good thing for her son when she left him that."

She never shuddered at his terrible words. She looked at him thoughtfully.

"They'll be searched for, and all discovered," she said.

"No!" triumphantly, "that fool of an elder girl, has helped me wonderfully; she has been most communicative. No one but the uncle knew they were in Plymouth. And he imagined that they left their ponies behind, and came home by the morning train. I asked her if the people at home would not be alarmed at their non-arrival."

"Oh, no!" was the innocent's reply. "They'll think we're staying with uncle. If even we did not appear for another three days they would feel no fear. Thus you see, sister, three days may go by without inquiry."

"But after that?" asked the cautious woman.

"I have a plan," he went on, taking the cork from the bottle. "Her foolish diary helped me in that. The girl has a lover who sails to-morrow from London to Australia. He wants her to marry him and go with him. The father, a hot-headed fellow, refuses his consent. The lover sails, you see, to-morrow. What is easier than to copy the girl's handwriting from the diary, send the irascible father a letter purporting to be from her, and telling of her flight to London from Plymouth—taking her sister and the money with her, and of her determination to sail with her lover. From what I gather of his temper, the father will believe the tale, and renounce his daughters, making no inquiries about them at all. There! What could be finer?"

"But if the lover should return?" suggested Rachael, thoughtfully.

"Bah! he never will. He is furious now at the way he has been treated; he won't want to return for some years, I'll wager, and by that time we shall be beyond suspicion."

"You're a clever one, Sam!" said Rachael, suddenly, having well considered all.

"We can get off splendidly!" he chuckled.

"That's not all, my girl. We'll outwit Symons, and keep our hundred pounds to begin the world anew."

"How?" she asked, eagerly.

"Wait till we're ready to start, then you shall know," he rejoined, with a hideous leer. "Let's get this well over first."

With firm, unhesitating hand he lifted the cup of coffee, and raised the little bottle containing that strange, purplish mixture.

"Wait!" she whispered, with a shuddering glance at the lattice, "let me close the shutter."

He gave vent to an impatient imprecation, but nevertheless waited until the heavy bolt was drawn. Swiftly she crept back and watched him dropping in the fatal mixture. The one cup was ready, placed on a small

tray. He was raising the other when her hand came on his arm.

"What the devil?" he began, but stopped as she leaned forward.

"Sam!" she whispered, hoarsely, "the other one is dumb! Dare you kill a dumb girl?"

They stood glaring at each other, fighting hard with their West country superstitions, but to no avail.

"No," he gasped out at last, "I dare not."

"Nor I. We must take her with us!"

"We can't!" he cried, roughly.

"Yes, we can. I have a plan too!"

She sank her voice lower as she went on, as if fearful lest their guilty communing should be heard. Evidently she persuaded him, for presently she took up the tray and carried those two cups upstairs.

"They have drunk the coffee!" she said, coming in again but ten minutes later, a self-satisfied smile on her thin lips. "I tucked them in and left them, Sam," laying her hand abruptly on his shoulder, as he sat with his head buried in his hands. "She'll look like an angel when she's dead!"

"Hush! confound you!" he muttered. "Don't talk like that. In an hour it will be over, then we must get to work."

They sat down to wait, silently, not daring to look at one another, starting nervously at every sound. And the wind moaned round the old house in melancholy fashion, sometimes rattling fiercely at the casements, as if knowing the dark deed that was perpetrated, and clamouring to burst upon the human fiends and sweep them away—at other times whispering sadly like a poor dumb creature in pain. And in that upper chamber where lay the two fair innocent sisters—a gentle quietude reigned. Locked in each other's arms they had fallen asleep as soon as Rachael left them.

"Come!" whispered the man, when yet another hour had gone, "she must be dead!"

Cautiously they crept upstairs, and pushing open the door of that quiet room entered.

A slight murmuring sound greeted their ears, and as they glanced towards the bed they saw that one of the sisters was sitting up, bending over her companion.

"The dumb girl!" whispered Rachael, and crept over to the bed.

There lay the beautiful elder sister as if in a deep sleep, her cheeks yet flushed, her eyelids calmly closed; and yet, as the guilty wretches saw at a glance she was dead—quite dead!

The poor dumb sister was bending over her, a wondering expression in her blue eyes; but as she looked up and saw them she laughed gaily and began to murmur again.

"Her brain's turned," muttered Rachael, grimly. "She must have seen the death struggle!"

"All the better. Take her and get her ready while I dispose of this!" said Sam, in cold, hard tones.

"Where will you take it?" she asked, placing her arm round the girl's slight form.

"To the old shaft. No one goes there."

She nodded and lifted Maude off the bed, meeting with not the slightest resistance.

With a well-satisfied smile the man took up his ghastly burden, and stole down into the stormy night with it.

Great clouds were rolling across the lowering sky. It would seem as though the pale, calm moon had hid its face in horror. The trees tossed their fantastic arms; darkest shadow gathered round the poisoner and his poor dead victim.

But little thought he of the darkness, he welcomed it the rather, and hurrying in his work, re-entered the house in less than a quarter of an hour.

His preparations were soon made, and Rachael was not less quick. Two letters he wrote, while his sister moved about the house placing things in order. The poor dumb girl sitting opposite to him, and smiling vacantly whenever he looked up.

One letter he placed in his pocket, the other he pinned on the inside of the door. Then, catching up a little shabby bag, and taking the girl's hand in his firm clasp, he called impatiently to his sister, and she joining them, they stole away through the dark old orchard.

Before another night fell on the old mine house, a dreadful piece of news had come to light concerning that lonely, desolate place. During the storm of the preceding night its mysterious master and mistress had committed suicide! They had thrown themselves down the deep, dark old well at the end of the orchard!

A farm labourer going to the house first thing in the morning, had found it empty, and discovered the letter on the door.

This was handed over to the police, and on being opened proved to be a short note from the man Parker, stating that he and his sister were tired of life, and were determined to kill themselves that stormy night. When his letter was found, he concluded, they would be lying at the bottom of the old well.

The police could do nothing. The ancient well was known to be almost bottomless, so there the bodies of the suicides were left to lie and rot away. But from that day the house was tenanted, no one would live in it, it fell into complete disuse.

People hurried by it whispering of its awful tale with bated breath, and glancing shudderingly towards the spot where the suicides were supposed to lie.

And even on stormy nights the superstitious country people would declare that they could hear the last despairing shrieks of the guilty couple as they leaped into the dark chasm of the dark old well.

CHAPTER III.

RENOUVED!

The Heriot girls had ever led a dreary, monotonous life, enlivened only by the long, rambling rides they were allowed to take on their stout, little Moorland ponies.

Dwelling always alone with a fretful, fanciful, invalidish mother, a proud, fiery-tempered and somewhat selfish father, and two solemn old servants, in a rambling, tumble down manor, the young girls had little intercourse with the outer world.

Too poor to entertain his neighbours, Mr. Heriot haughtily refused all invitations for his daughters, sternly ordering them to decline every proffered hospitality.

Six months before, to his intense horror, Kate had been introduced by the Vicarage girls to a cousin of theirs—a tall, handsome, cheery-faced young fellow—poor as the Heriots themselves, but blessed with a happy heart and indomitable will.

He had fallen headlong into love after his first swift glance at Kate's fair, sweet face, and she, giving over her heart straightway to this sunburnt young giant, had been very happy when, after several meetings on the moor, he declared his love and implored her to go with him to Australia to seek his fortune.

Kate herself was only too willing, but when he presented himself to her father and proffered his request, young Bouverie was met with a storm of anger and abuse, and ordered to go about his business.

"She is under age," shouted Mr. Heriot. "I refuse my consent."

A long argument ensued, but the desperate young man could not prevail. He was ordered from the house.

"Let me see her once more, sir," he pleaded. "I leave for Australia very soon."

"Glad to hear it!" growled Mr. Heriot. "No, sir, you shall not see her, but in a day or two you shall have a letter from her telling of her entire submission to my decision."

"She will never write it!" cried Bouverie, turning angrily away.

"We shall see," was the aggravating response.

In a few days came a little note from the girl Cathbert loved. He tore it open gladly, but his brow darkened as he read.

She had made a mistake—she wrote—her father was right. It would indeed be foolish to marry with such poor prospects. She wished him a prosperous voyage, and remained his sincerely, Kate Heriot.

"Is it her handwriting?" he asked of one of his plying cousins.

"Yes," said the girl, sadly. "I can't understand it, Cathbert."

"I can!" he cried, tearing up the letter and throwing it into the fire. "She is a poor, weak fool, and has submitted to her father!"

He went away to London after that, and things dragged on in the old way. Only Mr. Heriot went about more with the girls, thus preventing any meetings with the Vicarage people.

And poor Kate, knowing nothing of that cold, heartless letter, thought in her simple heart that the young man had imagined it best to go away quietly, seeing that her father was obdurate; and her cheerful, sanguine heart looked forward with delight to the time when her lover should return to claim her.

She knew how she loved him, and the time would not be so very long. Yet, though she was bravely resigned, she missed her gay, young lover greatly, and often the sweet face grew pale as she mused on that lonely voyage that Cathbert was about to take, and tried to assuage the longing to be at his side.

Selfish as he was, her father noticed the pale cheeks, and decided that a change would do her good, therefore seized gladly on the excuse of that sum of money being required to propose that she and Maude should ride over to Plymouth.

Kate jumped at the idea.

"We should like to go very much!" she cried, eagerly, an excited light in her beautiful eyes—a light that he remembered afterwards; "tis a lovely day, and if we go by the higher moor we shall soon be there."

"Well, I must have the money, and the old miser is more likely to give it if you ask, Kate," said her father, graciously.

The two girls were so accustomed to roam the moors on their ponies that he never hesitated to let them go; besides, he must have the money, there was no other messenger, and they would return by train.

So away they rode on a bright autumn morning, waving their hands to the fretful-faced mother, who, wrapped in a great shawl, carelessly watched them ride away.

No anxiety was experienced by the parents when the two girls did not return next day.

"Your brother Jacob has kept them another night," remarked the father, and taking up his book dismissed the subject from his thoughts.

His wife nodded her head languidly, and thought a little enviously of her daughters' short stay in the lively town. The day passed and still they came not.

"Jacob must be in a good temper," said Mr. Heriot; but felt a little indignant when next morning's post brought no letter from Kate. "She should have written," he said, in displeased tones. "However, there is sure to be one to-morrow, if they don't come before."

Sure enough the old postman toiled up the mossy avenue next day, and handed the impatient gentleman a letter addressed in Kate's bold hand writing.

"Now," he said, hurrying, "we shall hear if they have got the money, and when they are coming."

He tore open the envelope; but Mrs. Heriot, waiting languidly for his news, was astonished to see the veins in his forehead rapidly swelling—a sure sign that he was in a rage—and his face assuming a deep purplish tinge.

"The jade!" he gasped, "the hussey!"

Sailed in the *Victoria* two days ago with that accomplice Booverie!"

His wife gave a little horrified shriek.

"No, no!" she cried, weakly, "it is not true!"

"But I tell you it is, madam. All their plans were well laid. She got the money from your brother, went up to London, joined that villain, and sent this by the pilot!"

"They are married?" gasped the mother. "Of course not!" he cried, furiously. "She has disgraced the good old name, carried off her innocent sister, stolen my money, and— and lost her character!"

He rushed to the bell, and ringing it violently, summoned the two old servants, and in fierce angry tones told them the news, hiding nothing.

"And now hear me!" he went on, hoarsely, deeply incensed by the expression of pitying horror on their honest faces. "Never mention her name to me again, or if you do leave my service. She has been the first to disgrace the good old name. She is no longer worthy to be mentioned within these honourable walls. My curse be—"

"Ah, stop, sir!" shouted the grey haired manservant. "There is some awful mistake! That sweet angel never could have done such a thing!"

"How dare you speak, sir!" almost yelled Mr. Heriot, his eyes glaring with an angry light. "I have solemn proofs of it," waving his daughter's letter. "I say again, my curse be—"

Once more old Thomas sprang forward, but only to be stopped by his horrified wife.

"Hush!" she cried, "Heaven has stopped those awful words! Look at him!"

The butler turned, and saw that—even as the sentence trembled on his tongue—his master had fallen back into his chair. He had been stricken with paralysis!

For a few days he lingered, lying stiff and speechless, a fierce light shining in his glazing eyes, when his weak-minded wife—urged thereto by the Vicar and the old servants—ventured to speak of the missing girls.

"Leave your blessing for them, Mr. Heriot," pleaded gentle Mr. Booverie, one night when the end was very near.

The dying man raised himself suddenly, and stared angrily at his old friend.

"I will not!" he cried, in strange, thick tones, and with that fearful refusal on his lips, fell back dead!

The old manor was sold. All debts cleared off, and the fretful, peevish, widow, accompanied by the two old servants went to Plymouth, and took up her residence in her brother's house, paying him a small sum yearly for her keep. He, Jacob Boscombe, firmly believed in his niece's bad behaviour and in time persuaded his vacillating sister into the same belief.

Only the faithful servants placed firm faith in the girls' innocence, stoutly maintaining their conviction against every one. Only a few weeks later a paragraph appeared in the *Western Morning News*, headed, "Foundering of the sailing vessel *Victoria* bound for San Francisco. All lives lost."

"And better that than to live on in disgrace," muttered the old miser, when he had shown the account to his horrified sister. "Now, don't whine Joan, or if you must, leave me alone."

She looked at him hopelessly, then crept away to be comforted by the two heart-broken servants, and to think in anguish of the pure, sweet faces with their aureoles of golden hair lying beneath the sea.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEAD ALIVE!

WRAPPED up in herself and her little fancied ailments—sleeping and dreaming her life away, Mrs. Heriot many a time, after taking up her abode at Plymouth, would wonder

dearly why the days were now so long, the years so tardy in their onward march. Yet one morning when she awoke and, remembering that it was her birthday, began to calculate the length of her widowhood, she was astonished to find that thirty years had slipped by since that awful morning when the old postman brought such terrible news to the Manor.

A few changes had taken place. Her brother was dead, and had left her sole mistress of his house and magnificent income. Old Thomas too had died, but his wife yet lived, very aged and quite superannuated. Yet to her the lonely widow clung as the only link with the sad past, listening often, half impatiently, half in wistful eagerness, to the old woman's rambling tales of Kate and Maude. Sometimes in her agony of mind longing to stop the old servant, yet oftener losing herself in a burst of passionate longing for the sweet, girl faces, and the fresh, clear voices that had been for ever stilled by the awful waves. Ah, she would have given all her princely income for one touch of Kate's loving arms round her neck, one kiss from Maude's silent lips!

This birthday morning of her's as she lay on her couch after breakfast, listlessly watching the busy passers by, she tried in vain to turn her thoughts from the days of the past—to fix them on the novel she had taken up.

She laid it down in despair at last, and felt relieved when the sound of a ring at the door bell reached her ear. Some one coming to see her, she thought, as she took up her work. Well, she was glad of it; the effort of entertaining a visitor might banish those disagreeable reflections.

The door opened, and old Catherine came softly in, and creeping up to the sofa, stood before her mistress with blanched cheeks and trembling fingers, between which last she held a visiting card.

"Ah, mistress!" she cried, in shrill, quivering tones, "'tis the sea giving up its dead! 'Tis Mr. Booverie!"

"Mr. Booverie!" stammered her mistress. "Are you mad? Mr. Booverie!" she murmured, thinking confusedly of all this might mean to her, "he—he was drowned!"

"Nay, dear Mrs. Heriot!" cried a gentleman, just entering the room. "I was luckily picked up by an outward bound vessel and taken to my destination. I don't look like a ghost, do I?" with a pleasant laugh.

Mrs. Heriot, standing holding by a chair, and looking straight at him was forced to acknowledge that the frank, bronzed face and tall, strong figure, were indeed the very exemplification of health.

He looked almost as young as thirty years ago—the thought—his silvery curls and moustache alone seeming to show traces of Time's finger.

He had been followed up into the room by a younger man, and glancing at him Mrs. Heriot almost fancied she beheld again the handsome fellow who had fallen so madly in love with her bonny Kate.

"Who is he?" she whispered, taking no notice of Mr. Booverie's last words.

"My son Guy!" he said, proudly. "I—I married in Australia, but my wife died when the lad was born."

"Where is my daughter?" she cried, harshly.

He looked puzzled. "I came to ask after her," he said, quietly. "Though so badly treated I felt I must find out if she were well and happy and—married to some good man before I settled down in the old country. My own folks were all dead or far away. The Manor I found occupied by strangers. I made inquiries and found that you were living here. Is—is" faltering a little—"is your daughter married?"

The mother made a step forward, a fiercely angry look in her faded eyes.

"How dare you ask," she almost shrieked, "say?

"when you lured her away to cover her with everlasting disgrace! On! shame, shame!"

The younger man turned and looked curiously at his father's astonished face when this tirade was ended, but seeing the expression of haughty unbelief in the dark eyes his face cleared, and walking over to the window, he stood listening keenly to all that followed.

Mr. Booverie hesitated only a moment, then making a mighty stride across the room confronted his accuser.

"What do you mean?" he said, sternly. "Tell me all!" A deep frown gathered on his broad forehead as he listened to her awful tale. "It's a lie!" came from between his clenched teeth when she had finished her incoherent tale. "I never saw her after my interview with her father. Her cold, hard note came to me, and so angry did it make me that I vowed never to see her again. But," turning fiercely on her, "had you no mother's heart at all that you heard and believed that hateful story, believed that your sweet, pure daughter was a thief and—something infinitely worse? Oh, woman! it is for me to cry shame! shame! not you."

He turned and paced the room, while the wretched woman cowered down and hid her face in her hands.

"You believed her letter!" she moaned presently.

Something in her tones roused his suspicions. He stooped over her.

"Did she send it?" he asked, hoarsely.

"No," in low tones. "Her father copied her handwriting."

A low, pained cry came from the strong man's lips.

"Oh, what a stupid, cruel fool I was! And I left her without a word! I knew her father's influence over her, and thought she had weakly yielded. Oh, my poor, poor Kate!"

He fell into a chair and hid his head in his great strong arms, and Guy, with a look of deepest scorn at the miserable woman who had so quickly condemned her daughter, crossed over to his father and thrust his hand in his.

Suddenly an awful thought flashed into the elder man's mind—a thought that caused him to spring up and dash the heavy tears from his eyes.

"Heaven!" he cried, "where are those two poor things? Was no inquiry ever made for them?"

She shook her head helplessly.

"The letter came from Kate. We—we believed it, and then came news of the ship's foundering," she faltered.

He held up his hand hurriedly.

"Don't speak of that again," he said, sternly. "Such a thing never happened. Your daughters went on their message to Plymouth, obtained the money, as we know, left this house in good time next day, and—his strong voice trembling—"have never been heard of since!"

She bowed her head, but could not reply to the bitter scorn in his tones.

"Then," he went on, in bitingly sarcastic accents, "at the end of thirty years we are to find that those two pure, sweet girls did their errand cheerfully and well, obtained the money, set out on their homeward way and—disappeared without one question being asked or one effort made to trace them."

Faith! the evil deed may well walk about our fair island in perfect security and laugh in his sleeve at our inertness! I tell you"—laying his burning hand on her arm so suddenly that she uttered a faint scream—"there has been foul play!"

"But Kate's letter?" she moaned.

"Pshaw!" he cried, angrily. "That was a clever thought of the murderer; and many a time must he have hugged himself over the success of his idea. That letter stopped all inquiries. I may be wrong, but this is what I fear happened that day thirty years ago, Kate and her sister left this house early, you say? Well, the day was lovely, they knew

nothing of the coming storm, they determined to ride back. Overtaken by the tempest they sought shelter somewhere on the moor in some cottage or farm. And there, I say, they were foully murdered for the sake of that wretched money. Ay, and all this time their poor bones lie rotting somewhere on that vast moor, calling for vengeance on their murderer! Heavens! I wonder their sweet spirits have not haunted our dreams, reproaching us for our cruel neglect!"

Mrs. Heriot, terrified at his fierce words, burst into a flood of weak tears, but old Catherine sat erect with burning cheeks and bright, intelligent eyes.

"How could the—the murderer write that letter?" cried Mrs. Heriot at last. "He could not know all about you, the name of your ship and everything?"

Mr. Bouverie frowned perplexed. This was a difficult problem to solve. But help came from where he least expected it.

"Ay, he could!" cried Catherine, suddenly. "I remember me that the darling took her book with her—the one she writ everythin' down in."

"Her diary?" queried Bouverie, a sad, tender light stealing into his eyes, for he remembered that little book.

"Ay, sir, for sure she made me bring it and put it in her bag afore they left. Everythin' that happened were writ in that, I know."

"Thank you!" he cried, hastily. "That will help us a little. Come, Guy, my boy, we must find a clever detective to aid us."

"But thirty years ago!" murmured the mother, hopelessly, as Guy sprang eagerly forward.

"If it were twice thirty I should still set to work!" cried Bouverie, fiercely. "I swear," he went on, solemnly, lifting his head and hand upwards, "to hunt to the death the dastardly murderer!"

"And I too," added Guy, gravely. "Amen!"

"Thank you, my boy," said the father, in deeply-feeling tones. "Come, now, we must go to find the trail of the serpent!"

And with quick, firm step and brave hearts the two men sped away on their almost hopeless task.

(To be continued.)

DECIMA'S ORDEAL.

CHAPTER XI.—(continued).

"Do you speak any of the languages?"

"French a little. My mother spoke it well, but she was ill so much that she had small opportunity of teaching me. I think I read it better than I speak it."

"That is good. What kind of a position did you expect to fill when you reached your destination—that is, for what should you have applied?"

A shade of bewilderment crossed Decima's brow. In truth, she had not thought at all; but she dared not tell this practical woman that. With some embarrassment she answered,—

"I suppose there would have been nothing for it but to have gone to an employment agency and have taken anything that was given me."

The lady shook her head dubiously.

"A most uncertain dependence," she said, quietly. "How should you like to go home with me? It will be very easy to try you and see in what way you can be useful; then, if the plan fails, neither you nor I will be worse off than before."

Decima's eyes filled with tears.

"I don't know how I have deserved this kindness," she said, brokenly.

"Then you accept?"

"Most gladly."

"At least you will be safe with me for the time and if there is nothing that we can do I can advise you as to the future."

"I will try very hard to please you in any position in which you may place me."

No one could look into the honest little face and doubt that.

"I am sure of that. But we have made all these arrangements without even knowing each other's names. I am Mrs. James."

It hurt Decima grievously to be compelled to begin her new life with this kind woman with a lie; but, in order to save her mother the shame that had already ruined her own life, she knew that it must be done.

Her eyes fell; but she raised them bravely, and answered, without a tremor in her voice,—

"My name is Sophie Martin. I am a widow."

"Sophie! That is very pretty and suited to you. There is just another thing that we have not mentioned: were you going to the destination which you had chosen for any special reason?"

"No."

"Then you will not mind changing it?"

"Not in the least."

"That is well. We live in Leeds, my son and I, and have decided since the accident, and in consideration of the fact that all our luggage was burned, that we will return there at once. You will not object, then, to accompanying us?"

"I shall be only too glad."

"Then that is settled."

Mrs. James arose with a smile. She had taken a great fancy to the girl whose future she had taken into her own hands, and it was with something like a gratification of pride that she looked upon her beauty. She was standing with Decima's hand still clasped in hers when the door opened and a young man entered.

He was handsome, after the blonde fashion of the Norsemen, and filled the idea perfectly in so far as his form and features were concerned. Women raved over Fred James, perhaps one reason being his proverbial indifference to them all. It was that very fact which prevented any misgivings in the mind of his mother when she proposed taking the beautiful but unknown girl into her household as a member of her family.

There was no danger to Fred, and the mother turned to him without a thought of fear in her proud old head.

"The train leaves for London at four, mother," he said to her, in a slow, musical voice. "Shall you be ready?"

"Yes," she answered, smiling at him fondly. "We shall not go alone, however. The wreck has given us an addition to our lonely household, and I am sure you will feel as glad to have a young person in it as I shall. Let me introduce you. Mrs. Martin, my son, Mr. James."

Fred James bowed coldly; then, as his eyes rested on the beautiful face, the expression changed to one of intense interest, that might have aroused some alarm in his keen-sighted mother's eyes had she been looking, but she was gazing at Decima, and the unmoved countenance pleased her.

Her only fear had been for Decima, not her son; but, with a sigh of relief, that thought was removed.

How strangely the future convinced her of her own short-sightedness Heaven alone foresaw then.

CHAPTER XII.

"Bad news flies swiftly," and the old trite saying was never more fully verified than upon the occasion when London awoke the following morning with the news of the great railway disaster.

It was cried upon the streets by diligent newboys in connection with the printed story of the terrible storm; but none of the persons in whom we are most interested paid any heed. What had they to do with the railway disaster? Their own grief was surely great

enough without their weeping for others at that time.

Mrs. Bruce remained during the night with Miss Mortimer, while Clinton made two pilgrimages to the tenement to make sure that Decima had not returned there, but each time his fears became even greater than before. There was nothing like sleep possible for any one of them while Decima's fate remained a mystery, and it is doubtful if they even thought of it.

They made some pretense of eating breakfast; then, as he arose from the table, Graham announced his intention of going at once to the police station to see if there had been any discoveries made there. Mrs. Bruce returned to her own home accompanied by Miss Mortimer, as she knew that to that place Decima would come, if at all, and her wild grief and intense nervousness made it impossible for her to remain longer away.

Clinton could scarcely have described his own emotions as he entered that little office, fearful of the worst, yet hoping against hope for the best; but his heart seemed choking him as he stood before the sergeant's desk, utterly incapable of putting his question.

But the man, though he was not the same one who had been upon duty during the night, seemed to understand.

"Are you Mr. Clinton?" he asked.

"Yes."

"You have seen the man whom we sent over to you?"

"No."

The word was almost inaudible, so great was the anxiety underlying it.

The sergeant paused. He was so little given to sympathy in that life where the people he met, as usual, were such hardened wretches; but this man was different, and he was suffering.

"You have—heard?" stammered Clinton, unable to endure the silence.

"Yes. There is always a doubt of its being true, you know, and you must not abandon hope until there is none. Have you seen the papers this morning?"

"No."

"There has been a terrible accident on the railroad."

"An accident?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

Clinton's face was ghastly. He seemed to understand but too well what was meant, but he would not allow himself to believe. He listened with a strained, breathless horror that was piteous.

"The train was overturned from a bridge and then took fire. There are a great number of killed and wounded; more killed than they know of at present, as all the bodies have not yet been extricated."

"Yes," very quietly.

"Will you look at this?"

The sergeant reached under his desk and drew forth a morning-paper. He pointed to that fatal column "Killed," and gradually ran his finger down the column until it rested upon the lines.

"Miss Decima Bruce; pinioned by a broken seat and almost cremated. Clothes entirely destroyed."

Clinton saw nothing further. After all, what difference did anything else in the world make to him? Decima was dead!

He leaned against the desk, white and trembling, not a murmur escaping his palid lips. It seemed to him that the end of the world had come, and nothing mattered after that. Then he became aware, in that dead way that each of us must have felt under some great crisis in our own lives, that the sergeant was speaking to him.

"You don't know that it is true," he was saying.

"The station where the accident happened is not far from here. Why don't you take a friend with you and run up there? You see, they say she was almost cremated; might there not be some mistake?"

Clinton shook his head. His voice bore no similarity to his own as he replied,—

"It is not likely. How could they have got the name?"

The sergeant was silent.

"Good-day, sergeant," he said, heavily. "I shall see you again as soon as it can be done."

"You are going up there?"

"Yes."

The man looked after him as he went down the short flight of steps and into the street, then turned to an officer beside him.

"That fellow got it in the heart that time," he said, with genuine feeling. "I never saw a man feel anything more keenly. Heaven help him! I lost a sweetheart myself once."

Almost without knowing what he did, Clinton walked swiftly in the direction of Euston Station. Arrived there he bought his ticket, then sent a messenger with a simple note to Mrs. Bruce, telling her he had found some trace, but that was all. He took his place in the train with bowed head, knowing that he was going to bring home the body of the girl whom he had so loved, knowing that he should find her there and that she was lost to him for ever, yet betraying his emotion by never a word.

The most careless observer could have told how he was suffering; his most intimate friend would not have approached him under the sorrow that he must have recognized.

The conductor felt for him when he arrived at the station, knowing by intuition what he was going there for, for there were others upon the train with that same wretched mission before them. There were carriages to meet them, provided by the kindness and thoughtfulness of the Allen family, and almost as if they were following the lifeless bodies themselves, the carriages wound slowly up the hill.

Graham Clinton did not hesitate. With bowed head he walked into the room where a number of improvised biers were standing spectral with their white draperies in the shadowy light.

He spoke the name of the one he had come to seek in the ear of the attendant, who led him across the room and very gently turned the sheet from an upturned face that was still covered by a handkerchief.

How well he remembered the beautiful reddish-gold of that sunny head! He turned from it for a moment, his heart seeming strangled by a groan. It was the first that had escaped him, and was quickly suppressed. He would have removed the handkerchief, but the attendant stopped him.

"Don't do it, sir!" he exclaimed. "It would only make it all the worse for you to bear. She was so badly burned that even the doctors were horrified. Don't remember her like that, sir, if you ever loved her!"

If he ever loved her! How like bitterest mockery the words seemed to him! If only he could have exchanged places with her there, or have lain beside her, life would have seemed less hard; but he must bear it like a man. That was what she would have wished, and he knew it.

He gave the orders for her removal home, attended to every minute detail; then, knowing that all was done that could be done, he took the train home—the same train that carried the little form for whom he was grieving—to tell the story to that mother whose heart he knew would break.

If he could but have known that in the next car to him the real Decima sat, alive and well, his life—the months of weary misery that followed—would have been very different; but Providence, if always wise, is not always kind, and neither knew of the other's proximity.

Clinton was striving even in the first hours of his blinding grief, to fix upon some reason for her leaving home; but he could find none. Since he had discovered that she would have nothing further to do with him, he had let her alone, though his heart had

remained firm in its allegiance. He had even written to her that, if it were her will, the secret should be preserved from Miss Mortimer; yet in spite of all, she had gone.

Then the last words she had ever written him came back to his memory with singular force.

"I could not be happy, even in my grave, knowing that I had robbed her. If you would make me a recompense for the sorrow you have caused me by your silence, go on with your marriage to her. I do not blame you, dear; but you must do that for my sake. It is the last request that I shall ever make of you."

And it was.

What should he do now? All the nobility of the woman who was his promised wife came back to him. He recalled every act of hers of the night before, when his conduct must have appeared most strange to her. She, too, had loved Decima; and, with bowed head and heart breaking under its terrible burden, he saw that he must do what his love had asked. What mattered his life now?

And his resolution was, that he would tell her part of the truth—not all, in justice to Decima and let her decide the rest.

CHAPTER XIII.

HAD it not been for the bitter memory of the past and the horrible knowledge of what the future held in store for her, Decima would have been content in the new home into which it seemed that Heaven had sent her.

Mrs. James and her son lived alone in all the luxury of wealth, with none of its ostentation, and from the beginning, while Decima had her regular duties to perform—they were not menial—she was made one of them. There was never greater kindness or consideration shown a stranger than she received from both, and her lot, all things considered, seemed to have fallen into a peculiarly easy groove. She had told Mrs. James little of her former life, adhering as strictly to the truth as her unfortunate situation would allow, and her benefactress had asked no questions beyond what it was most desirable that she should know. Sophie Martin had been married, and her husband had died at a most pitifully unfortunate time, and that alone was enough to insure sympathy and kindly treatment of the good woman, even if the girl's beauty had not made its own undeniable impression.

But there was a cloud upon the horizon—a cloud that was to obstruct all the sun in Decima's new life, though still she was piteously unconscious of it.

She had been in her new quarters scarcely two months when the storm broke cruelly, fiercely, cutting her perhaps with almost as keen sorrow as she had ever known, from her very innocence of wrong. One duty which she was expected to perform each day, and which had become a peculiar pleasure to her, was that in the afternoon she should read to Mrs. James for a couple of hours—sometimes poetry, sometimes romance—a capacity in which Decima was peculiarly gifted. One afternoon while the reading was in progress, Fred James chanced to come into the room, and, fascinated by the sound of the musical voice, he sat down silently behind the reader and listened. From that day he was always present during those hours of the day. His mother generally fell asleep at the end of the time, a signal to Decima that her duty was done, and that her time was her own.

She had been reading upon the day in question from a popular romance in which the heroine quotes an extract from a little poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox,—

"You have heard me quote from Plato

A thousand times, no doubt;

Well, I have discovered he did not know

What he was talking about."

She had just finished the line when the gentlest and most refined of anores told her that Mrs. James slept. She closed the book, placed it upon the table, arose, and with a faint smile thrown to the son of her benefactress, she silently left the room. Her own chamber offered little attraction to divert her from her reflections, and she sought the little conservatory instead; for is there not something in the companionship of flowers that sweetens solitude? She wandered among them for awhile, then sat down beside a great Japanese lily of singular beauty, seeing nothing. Her arm rested upon the back of the seat, her head was turned in the direction of the window. She was evidently musing too deeply to hear the light footfall behind her, for her lips moved, and the words she had read fell from them,—

"You have heard me quote from Plato

A thousand times, no doubt;

Well, I have discovered he did not know

What he was talking about."

Her voice died away slowly, and she was startled to hear some one say,—

"Don't you think Mrs. Wilcox struck the key-note of a great truth when she wrote those lines? Do you believe that there can be anything like platonic friendship between man and woman?"

She glanced up, though she had already recognised the voice. It was Fred James who stood there. There was an expression upon his face such as she had not seen there before; but it did not alarm her. She answered very gently,—

"Yes. I believe in friendship. Do not you?"

He shook his head.

"Not that kind. A man is too indifferent for a friend, or too passionate. Certainly there is a sort of careless well wishing between the sexes, an occasional visit, perhaps some trifling attention, forgotten as soon as given; but not that kind of friendship, not the kind that sacrifices, that endures through all ages. That is love. Do you think a man always knows the moment that interest alters to love?"

Decima was looking at him without seeing him. Her memory had reverted to that sweet time when for those few months she had been so blissfully happy. Was there ever a time when she did not recognize that great love? Ah, dear Heaven! how her heart yearned over it! Was it to be wondered at then that her face assumed a dreamy tenderness that deceived her listener?

"Does it ever?" she questioned, in an undertone filled with emotion. "It seems to me that love is born upon the instant. It knows no past, recognizes no future, lives alone in the present. It is sufficient unto itself. There is but one holier creation of God, and that is gratitude."

Fred James was stirred to the very depths of his heart. How was he to understand that she was speaking to a memory and not to him? He knew that he loved that girl-wife, who was so recently widowed, and man-like, her sorrow had endeared her to him. He had misunderstood her words.

"Love knows no past."

That was the expressed thought that was her undoing.

He took the seat beside her and alighted his arm about her waist, his countenance filled with a manly, chivalrous devotion that was an honour to any woman.

"Sophie," he whispered, "I know that I have done little to deserve the love of any woman. I may be speaking to you with brutal suddenness, but if love is born like that, surely I may be forgiven. Darling, have you never suspected?"

But she had shrunk from him in fear and trembling.

"Don't!" she gasped, feebly, putting up

her hands as if to ward off a blow—"don't, for the love of Heaven! You don't know what you are saying! What do you know of me that you should—"

She paused, unable to continue, and he finished the sentence for her.

"That I should ask you to become my wife? I know that I love you. Is it not enough? Ah, don't! Do you think that I do not understand? You have suffered bitterly, cruelly, it only endears you to me. See, I ask no questions. I am more than willing to trust you. You shall have your own time. Only tell me that some day you will be my wife, and I shall be content to wait."

For the first time during those awful months of suffering Decima was weeping. Her whole heart seemed melting into tears. She did not repulse him as he drew her to his breast. It seemed such a comfort to rest upon the bosom of one whom she did not fear. She allowed him to soothe her, listened as he murmured words of hope and consolation; then she lifted her glistening eyes to his.

"I would give all this world, she said, brokenly, "if I were but worthy of your love, I would give my life if I might but answer you as I should like, but that cannot be. I can never be your wife—never! There are reasons that reach higher than eternity that will stand between you and that for all ages!"

"Sophie!"

"If you would spare me a grief as great as say that I have ever known, never speak to me again upon this subject. I have been so content here. Do not make it necessary that I should go out into the world alone, for I am afraid. I am so helpless, so cruelly alone, and oh, Heaven! life has been so hard!"

Still she had not drawn herself from his embrace. There was nothing in it beyond the expression of affection of an honest man; there was not a shadow of insult in the encircling arm. It was but a tender expression of love, that was all.

"If it distresses you, dear heart, you may be quite sure that the subject will be buried in my own bosom," he said, softly; "but there will come a time when you will repent. The greatness of my love insures that, and when that time comes there is just one thing that I would have you remember, Sophie, it is that a love like mine can know no death. When you have changed toward me—when my love has ceased to be a burden to you, you will come to me, you will tell me, you will trust me, will you not?"

She arose and stood before him, her eyes still shining under her tears.

"I will trust you all my life as the kindest, most generous, the noblest man I have ever known!" she said, brokenly.

He drew her to him, and her lips touched his forehead with the simplicity of a child; then he let her go.

If that had been all. But it was not. A pair of stern, cold eyes, glittering under a pride that was their owner's single and besetting sin, had witnessed the latter portion of the scene, had seen the tears, had heard the avowal of love on part of the man, and had heard the answer.

"I will trust you all my life as the kindest, most generous, the noblest man I have ever known," and her own construction was put upon it.

As Decima left the conservatory, a heavy hand was placed upon her arm, and a hoarse voice that she scarcely recognized said in her ear—

"Come with me to the library. I wish to speak with you."

The poor child looked into Mrs. James's set face, and that intuition that does not often err in women told her that another crisis in her life had come, the most cruel and undeserved, perhaps, of all.

CHAPTER XIV.

ALL through the miserable days that followed the discovery of her daughter's supposed

death and the burial of that unknown girl over whom such passionate tears were shed, Graham Clinton was more like a son to Mrs. Bruce than anything else.

He was beside her constantly, speaking some word of consolation, or performing some little act of kindness that, without acknowledgment upon her part, was an infinite source of comfort to her. She had not paused to question herself yet as to its cause. Her grief was too new and too bitter for that. She simply yielded to the sweetness of feeling that she was not quite alone in the world—that she was not entirely without friends, and indulged her sorrow.

And Clinton found the greatest comfort in ministering to her. All this Alice Mortimer watched in silence. If her great, true heart ached under it, if there was a suspicion aroused in her, if in the silence of her own chamber at night she grieved over a shattered dream, no one knew. She shut it up in her own bosom, conscious that her lamentations could effect nothing.

She was as kind—perhaps kinder—to Clinton than she had ever been before, and his heart smote him as he saw and thoroughly recognised the greatness of her generosity. How he cursed himself for the past only Heaven and his own conscience could have guessed; but it was beyond recall; and when his grief could be dominated by reason he saw that he must bury it in the grave that they had dug for his dead love.

With that thought uppermost in his mind he went to call upon Miss Mortimer one evening. He bent and kissed her as she came into the room—a thing which he had forgotten to do of late—but she did not repulse him. On the contrary, she smiled under it, and did not endeavour to disengage her hand from his as he drew her beside him upon the sofa.

"I am glad to see you looking better, Graham," she said to him, gently. "You are growing more like yourself again."

His face flushed.

"I don't think I can ever be like my old self in one way, Alice," he said, using the old pet name that he had used to her in childhood. "I should have to lose this new-found appreciation and gratitude to be that, and that would take something that is most sweet out of my life. Do you know what I mean. Ah, dear, how little I have known you! How little I have guessed the real worth of your character! How little I have deserved your affection!"

She grew crimson under the pleasure his words gave her. There was nothing that she could answer. To disclaim the truth of his statement was like affection, and there was nothing else to be said.

"I have a confession to make to you," he went on, after a pause—"a confession that should have been made long ago, but you are too brave to understand how an unpleasant duty is put off from one day to another, in the hope that it will come easier at some future time. You could not do that. You would face the situation at once."

She put up her hand with a little gesture of deprecation.

"Oh, hush!" she cried huskily. "How little you know me, after all! I am not brave, but the greatest coward under Heaven. If that had not been true, do you think I should not have relieved you of your embarrassment long ago?"

"You know, then?"

She hesitated before replying, then answered, very softly—

"I have suspected."

He covered his face with his disengaged hand. There were no tears in his eyes when he removed it, but she had felt a quivering sigh shake his entire form.

"Do you think you can ever forgive me," he whispered.

"There is nothing to forgive, Graham," she answered, striving to steady her voice. "You were not to blame. The heart is the one organ that will not be held in subjection.

I cannot quite understand the situation, but the only fault I have ever found was that you did not trust me. But that now is forgotten."

"Do you mean that there can no longer remain between us the promise that was given in the old days? Do you mean that you will not be my wife?"

She was silent a moment, then turned to him very gravely.

"Look at me, dear," she said, quietly, "and as you value your life's happiness and mine, conceal nothing of the truth from me. What is your own desire upon the subject?"

"That we should stand by the old pledge, Alice, if you think it will ever be possible for you to trust me again," he answered, earnestly.

A mist came before her eyes. A great cry of thankfulness rose in her heart, but there was little display of emotion in her manner to him. Tender, gentle, but not demonstrative, she pressed his hand slightly.

"Then your wish is mine, Graham," she replied.

He took her in his arms and kissed her.

"I have not deserved this," he said, his voice breaking painfully; "but I swear to you, Alice, that I will do everything that lies in my power to make you happy. I swear that if the devotion of my whole life can be reward sufficient for your generosity, it shall be yours for ever!"

"Don't!" she cried, desperately. "You make me feel such a hypocrite. Do you think that it is alone because of you that I have decided as I have? It is really your consideration of you, I should have said 'no' out of kindness, because I am afraid that I believe you would be happier without a wife; but I have not the courage of my own convictions. I love you! It sounds unwomanly and indelicate to say it under circumstances such as these, but it is my own selfishness that causes me to accept the sacrifice that you are making. Oh, Graham! can't you see? Can't you understand? If there were another woman living whom you preferred to me, I should release you without a word; but as there is not, I will do all I can to make your life a comfort to you, dear, and some day it may seem not so hard as it does just at present."

There was more passion in her speech than any he had ever heard her make, and the depth of love astonished him.

"Is it possible," he questioned, wonderingly, "that you have loved me like that?"

"Did you ever doubt it?"

"I never suspected. The arrangement was made for us, and you seemed always to me to have yielded—well, because it was the easiest thing to do. I did not think that my affection would have made the difference of a thought in your life."

"Graham!"

She had faced him passionately, all the glowing depths of her nature aroused and beaming through her burning eyes.

"Have I been so cold?" she asked, earnestly. "Have I been so unresponsive as that? Then I have deserved what I have received. But, oh, dear, you have been mistaken! All my heart and soul have been yours. I have loved you with a devotion that was a boundary line for every other emotion. My whole self was submerged in the sea of my affection—and you did not know."

"Forgive me."

"Oh, yes! Let us begin again. Let me teach you that I am not the creature for which you have mistaken me, who could give myself to the legalised crime of becoming the wife of a man whom I did not love. How little we have known each other, after all."

"But you have not yet heard all that I have to say. I must tell you the story of that past which ought to have belonged to you. I must—"

"No, I beg of you; don't do it. I want to

feel that I have trusted you without explanation."

"But there is danger, Alice. Think of what the future might contain."

"Nevertheless, I prefer that you should remain silent. Oh, grant me this! Let that episode be buried in the grave with her whom we both loved. I don't want you to feel that you must never speak of her to me if the inclination is upon you. I only wish that the history of that time should lie with you alone."

"It is not wise, Alice; it is not best."

"Then let the error be mine, and gratify my whim."

"Are you afraid?"

"No; but I had rather trust you."

"I must yield; but I do it with reluctance. Perfect confidence casteth out fear; you know."

She kissed him upon the lips, and he smiled his gratitude.

"You will be my wife at once?" he asked, softly.

She shook her head.

"No," she answered; "we must each have time to recover. To become your wife now would be most unwise. You must have time to forget. We are going to begin anew, you know. I shall not expect you to play the lover to me just at first. You must teach your heart to turn to me."

"But—"

"In this I am obstinate. You hold my promise in face of the past, Graham; but you must wait, dear. In the summer, when the flowers are in bloom again, then, if you will have it so, I will be your wife!"

"Heaven bless you, Alice!"

CHAPTER XV.

For some moments after their entry into the library there was a painful silence between Mrs. James and Decima, a silence which the girl felt she dared not break and which seemed to incense the proud woman all the more.

None of the tenderness and gentleness that had before characterised her manner, was noticeable then. She was cold and hard and stern as granite, for she had not received a cruel blow in her most vulnerable point?

She took a seat upon the sofa, sitting bolt upright, with her hands crossed upon her lap, after motioning her dependent to a chair before her.

"Sophie," she said, at last, her voice cold with that moisture that chills like ice, "do you think that I have deserved this treatment?"

Too sweet eyes filled with tears.

"I am afraid you have misunderstood a scene which you have just witnessed, dear Mrs. James," faltered the girl. "You have deserved nothing that was not most honourable from me, and I assure you—"

There was a gesture indicating a desire for silence.

"Don't add falsehood to your sin against me," exclaimed the elder woman, even more frigidly. "It is unnecessary and hurtful. I saw enough to quite understand what has been taking place here during the hours that I have trusted both you and my son. I confess to as great a disappointment in him as in you, the fault being equal. But it seemed to me that you owed me something more than this ingratitude!"

"Mrs. James, I beseech you to listen to me!" cried Decima, in wild distress. "Upon my honour there has nothing passed between me and your son that you would have censured either of us for if you had heard all. He has acted the part of an honourable man under the influence of a most unfortunate love, while I—"

"Have betrayed the trust of a benefactress," interrupted Mrs. James, her face crimsoning with anger. "I have no wish to say anything that is hard to you, Sophie, but

you have at least not behaved with the ingenuousness toward me that I had the right to expect. I took you in when you were homeless and friendless, when you were in a condition in which few women would have received you, and you have repaid me by endeavouring to entrap my son into an entanglement that is a disgrace both to him and to his mother."

With a little inarticulate cry Decima sprung to her feet. For a moment there was a flash of fire in her eyes, then she commanded her voice sufficiently to pant—

"Kind as you have been to me, Mrs. James, much as I owe you, you have not the right to say such things as that to me, nor shall you. I have never tried to entrap your son into anything. I don't think I should know how, even if I were to try. When your son asked me to be his wife he conferred an honour upon me that I appreciated with all my heart, but he did it entirely without encouragement from me."

Had Decima been less wounded over the conversation she might have seen the whitened indignation of that set, proud face; but her heart was too sore to take note of outward indications.

"My son asked you to be his wife?" questioned Mrs. James, in a voice hard as granite.

"He did."

A sneer passed over the rigid features.

"I think you are mistaken," she said, heavily.

Decima's sensitive lip quivered piteously.

"Don't say that, Mrs. James," she cried, brokenly. "I know that I have been most unfortunate. It may be that I am far from worthy of the honour that your son conferred upon me, but he is a gentleman who respects his mother too much to offer anything less than that to a woman beneath her roof."

That Mrs. James felt the rebuke keenly her expression but too plainly indicated, but it only served to increase her pride. But while pride dominated, fear was also in the foreground of her emotions. Was it possible that Fred really contemplated a marriage with this woman of whose antecedents he knew absolutely nothing? Was it possible that he could think of her when he did not even know to a certainty that her marriage was a reality and not a sham? But if he had made up his mind to a step like that, should she be able to prevent the union that would mean absolute, undeniable ruin to him? For that Decima would think of rejecting the offer that Fred would make her never even occurred to his adoring mother.

After a momentary silence and quick consideration the sneer faded from Mrs. James's countenance. Something of the kindness and gentleness to which she had accustomed Decima returned, but it was overshadowed by a certain decision of speech, a firmness of manner, that was not calculated to deceive.

"Perhaps you are right," she said, quietly, "and I have misjudged him; but even under these circumstances you must realize that a marriage with you would be utterly impossible for a man in his position. I don't wish to be hard upon you, I don't wish to wound you, but perfect frankness is absolutely indispensable at a time like this."

"Will you allow me one moment?" asked Decima, some of her own pride of birth betrayed in her tone. "I would not have you for one instant believe me insensible to the great compliment that Mr. James has paid me, but I had not the remotest idea of accepting him, for I do not love him."

Mrs. James stared at her in astonishment. Was it possible that the girl could be speaking the truth? At all events policy dictated that she should accept it as such.

An expression which she intended should indicate relief passed over her features.

"I am glad of that!" she exclaimed, earnestly. "Under those circumstances, perhaps you will not object to acting in the matter under my dictation?"

"I have none whatever."

"If my son has this foolish thing in his head, you must realize how much better it would be for you to be no longer under the same roof with him, at least until he has recovered from the fever, so to speak."

Decima started. A deadly pallor crept over her face. For the first time she seemed to thoroughly comprehend what this meant to her. She was to be thrown upon the world again at a time when it was hardest. She was to lose the friend who had been so much to her through no fault of her own. Friendless, helpless, with that hideous illness hanging over her that had already wrecked her life even with its frightful shadow, she was to be turned into the streets, for what fate Heaven alone could tell. She shivered slightly, but answered with the calmness of despair,—

"Yes, I see."

"That is well," returned Mrs. James, with no endeavour to conceal her satisfaction. "Of course, to remove you from the house would not be of the slightest use if he were allowed to know where you had gone, but that is what we must prevent. Will you tell me what your answer was to him when he made this proposal?"

"I was too much agitated to remember either his words or my own; but it was a rejection."

"And his reply?"

Decima hung her head for a moment, but with no desire to withhold the truth.

"He was very kind to me," she answered, tremulously. "He said that he loved me too much to accept—"

Her voice broke, and Mrs. James's fingers closed spasmodically. Her son must be saved, let the cost be to another what it would.

"I understand," she said, with more coldness than before. "I think that you perceive that you owe me something of gratitude for my friendship for you in the past—a friendship which you must see was purely disinterested; do you not, Decima?"

"I do, Heaven knows!"

"And you would do something to repay it?"

"Anything that lay within my power."

And looking into the earnest face, Mrs. James could not doubt the truth of her words. There was some genuine relief in her countenance. She leaned a trifle toward Decima and took her hand.

"I know it will be hard upon you at a time like this to go into a strange place; but you see the necessity as well as I can point it out to you. You must go away at once without seeing Fred or allowing him to suspect that you are going. When you are gone you must be particularly careful that he does not discover you. Have I your promise that you will do this?"

"You have."

There was the anguish of death in the young voice. But what was there left for her to do? She knew that she could no longer remain in the house where her attraction had been her greatest misfortune. But what should she do under this new bitterness that was opening before her? Where should she go? And what should she do?

Mrs. James seemed to read something of the horrible fear of the future that was passing through her brain.

"You need not think that I shall quite abandon you," she said, more kindly. "Let me see that I can trust you, and I will do all I can to assist you. I am more sorry than I can say that this has occurred; but since it has, the sooner the wrench is made, the better for us all."

"I see," said Decima, huskily. Her eyes gleamed under the suffering she was enduring. "I shall go at once. There is nothing I can say that would express my regret for what has occurred; but I swear to you that your son is as safe from me as if eternity were between us. Good-bye, and Heaven bless you for your kindness to me! The worst pain that I endure is in the thought that you believe in my in-

gratitude. Some day, perhaps, you will discover that I have not deserved it. May I kiss your hand?"

She raised the jewelled fingers to her lips held them there a moment, then, with a tremendous effort at strangling the sobs that rose in her throat, she staggered from the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

ALONE, friendless, even more hopeless than she had ever been, Decima found herself once again in the streets, with not even the shadowy hope of a trifling success that had before animated her. She was too proud to accept the assistance that Mrs. James had offered her, but merely taking the money that was hers by right of earning, she left the house that she had grown to look upon almost as her home.

It seemed to her that she herself had erred in some unknown way, that Heaven should send such distress upon her. Then she remembered how other women had suffered, and strove to be brave. But it was a weary fight. Uter desolation seemed to weigh her down—a desolation from which there seemed absolutely no escape.

And, worse than all, there was no promise in the future.

It was worse than a blank, for here was the knowledge of that other hideously shadowed, little unknown life for which she was responsible. A wild grief like mania came upon her as she left the house. Suddenly the world became a blank. She knew nothing, cared for nothing, save the fact that she was alone and wretched. Could she have done so then, she would have called Graham Clinton to her at whatever cost to another.

"Why should I care?" she exclaimed aloud, as she staggered along under the gathering darkness. "Her sorrow could not be so great as mine. He would come to me. I know it—I know it! It would give my child a name—my child whom I have no right to brand with the shame that is only mine! Great Heaven direct me! I have borne so much that I can bear no more. Have mercy upon me!"

The shades of evening were rapidly descending; a few cold stars twinkled here and there in the heavens, and a weakening moon filled the sky with a pale light that failed to reach the earth. The night was clear and cold, and numbers of pedestrians thronged the streets. She saw none of them. She was led simply by the misery that was upon her, uninfluenced by any intention whatever.

Mrs. James had given her some advice as to the best place of residence during the next few weeks; but if Decima had listened, she had already forgotten.

She paused under one of the street lamps, leaning against it for the support that her trembling limbs refused to yield, and seemed to consider.

"Which shall it be?" she asked herself, in a quivering voice, as she looked at the twinkling stars for her answer. "Which shall it be? I can bear it no longer. My strength, mental and physical, is exhausted. To send for him, or—the river? Oh, my love, my love, why did not you see all this and save me? Why could you not understand—you who knew life and its suffering—what was in store for me, and save me from the curse of our folly? You did not think! I know! I know! You loved as blindly, as foolishly, as madly as I, and the future was veiled. You do not know truth or Heaven could not have separated you from me. But you must know now! You must! I would bear it if I could, but I cannot, and I have not the right to end it all in death!"

She paused to consider it no longer. There was an expression of wild determination in her eyes. The fire of fever was leaping in her veins.

She turned to the first person upon whom her eyes rested, and in a voice that had grown reckless and defiant, she asked,—

"Can you tell me where the nearest telegraph office is?"

"Two streets further on to the left," answered the man whom she had addressed, looking curiously at the flushed, excited face.

"Thank you!" she exclaimed, hurriedly, and started away.

But already a sensation that she could not comprehend was overcoming her. Her head had grown giddy. Her brain was reeling. She paused and pressed her hand heavily against her forehead.

"What is the matter with me?" she groaned. "Am I going blind? Great Heaven!"

For a moment she stood there swaying to and fro. The man who had given her the information regarding the telegraph office started toward her, but before he could reach her side there was a heavy fall, and she lay there quite motionless, face downward, upon the street.

An officer was crossing the street as the man raised her in his arms.

(To be continued.)

A LATE ATONEMENT.

CHAPTER III.

It was within a week of the return of Ronald Fenton from the crown colony where he had been stationed seven years, that another traveller also took a ticket to London by the South-Western Railway, and his object too, was to seek out a friend he had not seen for some years.

Like Ronald he had been absent from the great metropolis. Like him, too, in seven years he had held but scant communication with those who lived there; but here all resemblance in the history of the two men ended. In all else their story was as different as their faces.

Horace Clifton possessed his full share of good looks. He was a man not much over thirty, with features as regular as a girl's, beautiful deeply set blue eyes so mobile in their expression that they could reflect any passion from hate to love, scorn to entreaty. For the rest he was of middle height and slightly made.

He might have been called effeminate, but for his closely cropped black head, which had not a superfluous hair about it, and his bronze skin, which told of exposure to sun and wind.

His clothes were not remarkable. A plain suit of blue serge, fitting badly and having somewhat the appearance of the costumes displayed ready-made in the windows of cheap tailors, and labelled "This style only thirty-five shillings;" but his air and bearing were not without refinement, and his hands were carefully cased in brown kid gloves, while a quiet felt hat completed his attire.

Probably he had been absent long enough to feel keenly the pangs of home sickness, for as the train neared London he put out his head continually to catch sight of some familiar object, and when at last the collector appeared to take the tickets at Vauxhall a look almost of triumph crossed the handsome face, and he murmured to himself,—

"At last!"

Low as the word was spoken it reached his only fellow traveller, an elderly man seated in the opposite corner of the third-class carriage. The pathos in his companion's voice touched him, and he asked, pleasantly, if he had been away from England long.

"It is seven years turned," was the frank reply, "since I was in London. I expect I shall feel like a stranger. Things must have altered in that time."

"There is a very decent hotel close to the station," said the old gentleman, in a friendly way. "I often use it myself, for I live in Hertfordshire, and when I come up by this train I generally find it is too late to get on till the morning."

"Then you travel pretty frequently on this line, sir?"

The old gentleman did not resent the curiosity.

"My only son is an officer in one of the mail steamers which sail from Southampton, he has a house down there, and I often go and spend part of his leave with him."

"Southampton seems a pleasant place enough."

"I suppose you landed there?"

Horace evaded this question.

"I used to know Hertfordshire very well," he said, meditatively. "My father had a farm there years ago; but farming is only another word for starvation now-a-days."

"Not in our part of the world. Most of Mr. Rushton's tenants make a pretty good thing out of it. He's the squire in our neighbourhood, and a very nice man."

"Then you come from Kesterton?"

"I've lived in Kesterton for half a dozen years. A small property came to me there. It wasn't much to sell so I settled down on it myself."

"Ah," Horace fixed his beautiful melancholy eyes full on the old gentleman's face. "I was born within ten miles of Kesterton. I know every corner of the town."

"And you are going back there?"

"I may run down and look round the old place some day; but I have no ties left there. Most likely no one there would even remember me, and it's not pleasant to be forgotten."

"Tut, but man there must be some of your old friends left. People don't change their homes often in that part of the world. Why, the Squire was telling me only the other day he'd only changed one of his tenants since he came into the property, a score of years ago."

"He must be getting old," said Clifton, quietly.

"Over seventy a good bit. I suppose he'll be looking out for a husband for Miss Arline one of these days, she's his heiress, and as fine looking a woman as you'll wish to see, but she's in no hurry to marry, she must be nearly thirty, and yet she's never had the ghost of a lover people say."

"Perhaps she's a temper," suggested Clifton, "though her mother was a gentle creature, and I'd warrant a good one."

"Aye, it was a sad loss to the place when Mrs. Rushton died, the Squire's never been the same man since."

"You don't mean that Mrs. Rushton's dead, why she was years younger than her husband."

"She's been dead these two years. They've only just put off their mourning."

"I think I'd like to try the hotel you were speaking of," said Clifton, as they reached Waterloo, "I feel about tired out."

It was natural after this that the two travellers should take their supper together. Clifton was singularly silent as to his foreign experience. He said nothing at all about the seven years which had passed since he left London, but he listened with great interest to Mr. Bailey's reminiscences of Hertfordshire, and the old gentleman was so pleased to find such an attentive auditor, that before they parted he had given the wanderer a warm invitation to visit him at Ashted.

"You can't mistake the house. Its on the high road from Kesterton to Digby End, and about half way, you're pretty sure to be coming down one of these days to look at your old haunts, and if you will come to us for a night or two, we shall be delighted to put you up."

Horace Clifton sat up smoking far into the night, his thoughts were busy with the past and yet more with the future.

"What an idiot that old fellow is. I wonder if he invites every one he meets to come to

Asked; but I think I played my cards well, and it will be a decided convenience if I can stay a day or two in the neighbourhood, as "Mr. Bailey's friend," it will silence all disagreeable rumours and unpleasant curiosity. I shall find out much better how the land lies, if I am on the spot. Of course, if old Rashton is likely to depart this life, it would be my wisest plan to keep quiet and make no claim on him, but if he's going to last ten years or so, why not better come to a settlement at once; anyhow, I hold the winning cards, and with a little caution, I shall step into a very comfortable income, either with or without a partner."

He wrote two letters before he went to bed. The first was very short and simple, being only a request to an old friend to come and see him at the hotel, or else name some other meeting place without delay; but the second was more difficult of composition, and Clifton spoils several sheets of paper before he composed anything which satisfied him.

"That must do," he ejaculated, nodding a sigh of relief, as he folded the ninth attempt and placed it in the envelope. "After all I don't see why I need be so cautious in what I say to her, her interests are so tied to mine that she ought to agree to what I ask if not I shall have to make her understand that it is dangerous to defy me."

And the completed letter ran thus:—

"MY DARLING,—

"After years of enforced separation, which, I doubt not have been as trying to you as to myself, I am once more in England, able to reclaim my own. Shall I come to you or will you join me here? Be assured I shall not endure a much longer parting. If you have not told our secret you may like to consult me before you divulge it. I am ready to come to you at any day or hour only as my funds are at a low ebb, and I cannot afford to stay here long, let me know your decision soon. I hope it may be a summons to join you at once. Yours, till death, "H."

Then, as though repenting of this letter as too submissive in tone, Mr. Clifton had added a postscript.

"You will understand that I possess all the papers that will enable me to claim as a right what I now humbly sue for. Don't drive me to extremities my queen or you will see me arrive suddenly and explain everything myself to your respected parent, a course you may hardly approve."

CHAPTER IV.

RONALD FENTON awoke the first morning after his arrival in England, with a strange presentiment of coming trouble.

As he sat over his breakfast at the hotel he tried in vain to reassure himself by the reflection that thus far his success had been beyond his hopes. He had got rid of his terrible encumbrance, and need no longer travel with what everyone perceived in taking for a red coffin. He could feel assured that the treasure chest was safe in the bank's strong-room, and that nothing remained for him to do but trace out the rightful heir of Will Trevlyn. It was true he had thought it a difficult task, but then Mr. Davidson seemed to think the problem would be not to find an heir, but to distinguish the true one from a number of claimants. His enterprise had been favourably commenced. He had met an old friend his first day in London, which, solely in itself, was a good omen and yet—albeit not a superstitious man—poor Ronald felt terribly depending as he sat at breakfast, and devoutly wished Mr. Grieves had made his late statement himself, or else confided it to someone else.

Ronald's first step was clear. Before he did anything else he must go to the office of the shipping company in Leadenhall-street, and try to find out if they remembered to whom they had forwarded Will Trevlyn's effects. It was

five and twenty years ago, but then first-class passengers do not often die at sea. He had fortunately, the name of the ship, and the date of her leaving Cape Town, so he did not quite despair of obtaining the information he so much desired.

A very civil speaking clerk came forward at the office, and inquired his business. To Ronald's surprise the young man seemed quite at ease with the subject.

"You mean Mr. William Trevlyn, who died on his homeward voyage in 1860, and whose family believed he brought home a fortune, which ultimately proved to be only a chest filled with stones?"

"Yes," said the chaplain much relieved to find the matter so fresh in the memory of the clerk (who, by the way, must have been in frocks and pinafores when it happened). "I shall be very much obliged if you let me have the address of the persons to whom you forwarded that chest?"

The clerk hesitated a moment.

"I'll just speak to our manager, sir. He's in his private room and disengaged."

Another delay. This time Ronald was kept waiting some five or ten minutes before the clerk returned.

"Mr. Day would like to speak to you himself if you'd step this way please, sir."

A very comfortable private room furnished like a lawyer's and occupied by a very pleasant, keen-eyed man of about sixty.

"Sit down, Mr. Fenton," he said, cordially, indicating a chair. "I'm afraid there's something wrong about this business. I had a note this morning from my friend Davidson, the banker (we've been intimate for years) asking me to give you every assistance in my power, and I was quite prepared to do so, but—something unforeseen has occurred."

"Perhaps it is against the rules for your address book to pass out of your own office. If I might be allowed to copy the address I should be grateful."

Mr. Day shook his head.

"I remember Mr. Trevlyn's death perfectly," he said, gravely, "the fact is there was rather a stir about the chest. The family knew the poor fellow had had brain fever, and I must say they behaved very generously so, but my father's opinion—he was one of the managing directors then—was that the chest had been changed either on the voyage or during Mr. Trevlyn's stay at Cape Town. He declared the box we despatched to Mrs. Trevlyn bore the name of a firm at Cape Town, whereas of course, the inference was that the poor fellow packed his treasures in Australia. Well, to cut a long story short, my father was so interested that he kept every letter he received from Mrs. Trevlyn and her friends on the subject, and he requested her to keep him informed of her address, in case any light was ever thrown on the mystery."

"And did she comply?"

"For the first two years she did, then she wrote that for her children's sake, she was on the eve of a second marriage, and her intended husband insisted on her little ones taking his name and being brought up as his children. She gave his name and the address which would always find her, and my father duly put her letter with the other papers bearing on the subject."

"And you will give them to me?"

"I would give them willingly to you if they were in my keeping. Yesterday, just towards the closing hour of our office, a lady came and made inquiries respecting Mr. Trevlyn. There was no responsible person left at the office, and the young clerk who admitted you, handed her the packet."

Ronald's face fell. The manager went on. "I can hardly blame him. Only last week there had been a general turn out of the papers here, and I had said in his hearing I saw no need in keeping this particular packet. It was labelled 'Trevlyn,' to be kept till applied for.' I have no doubt he believed it all right."

"Would he know the woman again?"

"I am sure he would. He gave me a very minute description of her. She told him she had just arrived from the Cape."

Ronald Fenton shuddered when he heard the description. Word for word it applied to Mrs. Dixon. Truly his one day's delay was likely to cost him dear.

"All I can do for you," said Mr. Day, kindly, "is to give you the address entered in our ordinary list of passengers. It is a lodging-house in the Kennington road, but I know the Trevlyns only stayed there a few months."

"And you cannot recall the name of the man Mrs. Trevlyn was going to marry?"

"I have no idea of it. It is possible if you searched the *Times* you might find it entered among the marriages. In your place I should advise."

"I dare not," said Ronald, simply. "There is a large fortune at stake, and if I advertised I might draw down on myself a crowd of claimants of whose rights I could not judge."

"Mrs. Trevlyn had three children, two girls and a boy," said Mr. Day. "She was a very pretty woman, and devoted to them. I should say her second husband was a man of wealth and standing."

Ronald Fenton took leave of the general manager, and set off for Kennington. He was feeling angry with himself, and indignant at having been foiled by a woman.

It still puzzled him to understand what advantage Hester Dixon expected by thus forestalling him.

Under no circumstances could she pass herself off as Nancy Trevlyn or her daughter. All he could think was that in her greed for gain she hoped to find the missing heirs, and extort a considerable sum of money from them as the price of her information; but the motive seemed inadequate for the crafty way in which she had distanced him.

By her own showing, Hester had ample means for her support. Why should she undertake a long and arduous search to increase her income?

Ronald found the house at Kennington, and, to his delight, discovered that its late proprietress still lived there as assistant to the daughter, the present landlady.

True, Mrs. Barton was hard on eighty, but she possessed all her faculties, but little unimpaired; and if—as her daughter put it—she forgot what happened last week, her memory was excellent for the events of long ago.

The old dame received Mr. Fenton in her own parlour; listened to his inquiries with great attention, and finally replied,—

"Of course, I remember them perfectly. Mrs. Trevlyn took my best rooms when she expected her husband home; he had made his fortune at the gold fields, and was bringing back a box of treasures."

"Yes," said Mrs. Johnson, a buxom matron of forty, chiming in, "I was a slip of a girl then, and I used to think it would be like a fairy tale to have so much gold in the house. They made no secret of it either. Poor things, they had known so much poverty, I think joy pretty well turned their heads."

"And how old were the children?" asked Ronald, hoping for a clue. "If you can remember so long ago."

"There was the baby," said Mrs. Johnson, ticking them off on her fingers, "she was born after her pa went to the goldfields, and he never saw her. I should say she was nearly three. Dot, the eldest girl, was thirteen; she and me were playfellows, for there wasn't two years between us. Bob came next to Dot, and he was a sickly boy. There had been others, but they died. Dot was a pretty little thing, the baby was dark. I never shall forget the day the chest came, and they opened it. Mrs. Trevlyn cried ready to break her heart, and Dot would have it her pa had been robbed, but the gentleman—her uncle, I think he was—said the poor man's brain must have been gone when he wrote such accounts of his treasures."

"And you have lost sight of the Trevlyns?"

"Lor, sir," said Mrs. Johnson, reproachfully, "one couldn't keep up with all one's lodgers, and it was five and twenty years ago. They all went to live with their uncle in France, and that's the last we heard of them. But was a dear little thing, and I didn't mind Bob, but the baby was a bad-tempered, cross child as ever I saw."

It was no use lingering. Ronald pressed half-a-sovereign into the hand of a rather dirty little Johnson, and begged her mother to write to him if she ever heard of her former lodgers.

Then he took his leave with the reflection that he had not the faintest idea what steps to take next.

He called on Mr. Davidson that afternoon. He felt enough trust in the banker to be sure he would not grudge a few minutes of his time. The old gentleman listened attentively.

"Well, Fenton, I don't think you have done so badly after all."

"I have done nothing," groaned Ronald; "there is no clue at all. That woman has walked off with what might have guided me, and I have no ray of light to help me."

"Well, of course I am only a practical, commonplace person, but I should say you had made one or two points by your visit to Kennington."

"The people there had no hopes of hearing of anything to help me."

"No, but they told you two or three important facts. You got the ages of the three children, and the positive assertion that the elder girl was very small and fair, the younger one dark and big. People change a good deal, Mr. Fenton, but at thirteen a girl's complexion is settled. If she was fair then, the probability is she can't be dark now at thirty-eight; then at thirteen, children can remember facts. Whoever comes to you claiming to be Will Trevlyn's elder daughter must answer a few questions. If she gives you any idea of where she was when the news came of her father's death, if she can tell you her own pet name in those days, and that of her little sister, it will be something in her favour."

"Mrs. Johnson told me she could recognise Doi Trevlyn anywhere by a mole just behind her ear. She said, as girls together, they were always trying to paint it, but nothing hid it for long."

"Come, come," said the banker, cheerfully, "I think you've done wonders. Now don't worry yourself to fiddlestrings, Mr. Fenton. Your red cuff—as my porter calls it—is safe in my strong room, and really, I should think to be freed from that alone was a subject for rejoicing."

A happy thought struck Ronald that evening after dinner. Mrs. Cooper and her children were staying in London for a few days before joining the Colonel at Plymouth. Why should he not call to-morrow and learn from his friend if she could supply him with Mrs. Dixon's address.

The little chaplain was no coward, and he would have interviewed Mr. Griev's late housekeeper with all the goodwill in the world. There would be no occasion to publish his real motive to Mrs. Cooper if he went to work diplomatically, indeed his call might be ascribed to mere friendly politeness.

The Coopers were staying with some relations at Clapham Common, and Ronald, with utter oblivion of English visiting hours, presented himself some minutes after eleven o'clock.

The next parlour maid looked surprised, but ushered him into a drawing-room, where, at the piano, a little girl was having a music lesson, while one of Ronald's child friends, Pearl Cooper, was coiled up in a chair near, listening to the performance, and now and again expressing her approval.

Pearl sprang to greet her favourite Ronald, and assured him "mamma" would be here soon.

The little performer stopped short, and the music teacher looked uncertain whether she

ought to break off the lesson or insist on her pupil continuing the fantasia on that time-honoured theme, the "Blue Bells of Scotland."

The little chaplain was a gentleman to his finger tips.

"Pray don't let me disturb you," he said, courteously, to the stranger, "I ought not to have come so soon, but I particularly wanted to see Mrs. Cooper."

"Mother is in the nursery," said Pearl, with terrible frankness; "but Aunt Lucy has gone to London. She will be cross. She likes to talk to you, Mr. Fenton."

"Pearl, dear," and the music teacher's voice was very gentle, "hadn't you better go upstairs?"

"Oh no. Mr. Fenton wants me. He and I are very great friends, Miss Rose."

Miss Rose smiled. The smile made her beautiful while it lasted, but it faded too soon, leaving her a pale, shabby young woman, with a thin face and a rusty black gown, and eyes that looked too large for her wan, pinched cheeks.

Ronald looked at her with pity, though he strove to hide the sentiment for fear of hurting her feelings. She belonged, too evidently, to a class of woman he had never met. Gently born, but so poor as to have much ado to keep up the appearance of a lady.

Her shabby clothes, her poor tired face looked so out of place in that luxurious drawing-room, where everything that money could buy had been so lavishly collected. Just as her shabby black serge seemed at variance with the dainty cashmere frocks of the little cousins.

"Katy is shy," commented Pearl, as the little student of "The Blue Bells of Scotland" disappeared, "she is very shy. I am never shy, Miss Rose?"

"I can quite believe it, Pearl. I think I will say good-bye now. Katy's lesson was nearly over."

"Oh, don't go," pleaded Pearl. "You are so much nicer than Katy's nurse, and we have no nurse of our own, you know, she left us at Southampton. Couldn't you stay and take care of us, Miss Rose?"

"I'm afraid not," and she stooped to kiss the little speaker, "there are other little girls waiting for their music lessons, Pearl, and what would they say if I stayed here?"

Enter Mrs. Cooper, her soft, marino brushing against the shabby serge as she passed the governess on her way out.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Fenton. Why did you not let us know? Lucy is out."

How could he tell her after this he only wanted the address of her nurse?

"I thought I should like to say good-bye, Mrs. Cooper. We had no time in the bustle on Monday."

"I am very pleased to see you, but I won't say 'good-bye,' you will be back in six months I hope."

"I doubt it. When do you go on to Plymouth?"

"Next week. I must stay here till I can find a nurse. The woman I had on the voyage stipulated to leave us at Southampton, she wouldn't even go with us in the train to London. I would have given her high wages if she would have stayed, she was a most efficient servant."

"Couldn't you write and try to bribe her?" suggested Mr. Fenton, artfully.

"I believe I should if I knew where to write; but she never gave me any address so, you see, I have no chance."

"The children have some play fellows here I perceive. I am afraid I interrupted somebody's music lesson."

"Katy's, my niece. She is a nice child; but my sister is very foolish to let her study so young. She is only six, and this Miss Rose has been teaching her a year."

"Miss Rose is so nice," put in Pearl. "Mother, can't she come with us to Plymouth?"

"If you would believe me, Mr. Fenton,"

said Mrs. Cooper, who loved to pour out her domestic trials to anyone who would listen, "I actually offered to take the girl with me as nursery governess and she refused. Said she couldn't leave her mother and sister. It's absurd, for the whole family are so poor they can hardly pay their rent."

Ronald got away from Clapham Common without waiting for Miss Taylor's return. He had never liked Mrs. Cooper so little as on this morning. Why should she speak so harshly of the poor little music teacher, who, doubtless, loved her mother as well as richer daughters do.

Ronald wished he knew where Mrs. Rose lived, he would have liked to help her; somehow he could not forget Mona's pale, thin face and sweet, musical voice. Why should he be rich and a girl like that poor? It was a problem he could hardly solve.

He never forgot that morning's chance encounter, little did he guess how he and Mona Rose were destined next to meet, and the strange influence she would have upon his life.

CHAPTER V.

PERHAPS Mary Cooper, who was a kind-hearted woman in the main, would not have spoken so harshly of her sister's music teacher could she have followed the girl to the dreary lodgings she called "home," and seen the mother to whom she clung so fondly.

Kennington, though only one letter different in orthography from a fashionable suburb, is miles different in all else. Like so many places south of the Thames it has "gone down" of late years.

The large old houses with long gardens are almost its sole vestige of its former charms. It was reckoned a great locality for lodgings, and the two advantages perpetually quoted by the would-be landladies are its cheapness and convenience.

For a penny the dweller in Kennington can be taken to his daily work in the City—if a man—for a penny the daily grocer can be transported into the select suburbs of Clapham, Brixton-hill, or Denmark-hill. While no place in the whole radius of London can boast apartments of lower rents or shops of greater cheapness.

To Kennington then Mrs. Rose had removed herself and her children when death took the husband and bread winner. At Kennington she had lived for over a dozen years. At first the girls went to the High School, the mother by almost superhuman energy, earning enough for all. Then a brother of the dead man left a hundred pounds to his sister-in-law, and this gave the girls a finish to their education, paid off a few small debts, and formed a nest-egg for rainy days.

Alas, the rainy days came all too soon. Before her girls were able to earn their own living, Mrs. Rose found her health failing. By the time the twin sisters were at work their mother was too ill to toil any more. The three clung together. Elly was teacher in a school. Mona gave music lessons. Mrs. Rose laid out the money to the best advantage, and making the little, dingy rooms homelike just by force of her loving spirit and gentle ways. There might be poverty, but there was no strife at No. 99, Sidney-place. There would be bitter grief when the twins realized how near was the dread angel of death. Mrs. Rose, poor, patient woman, knew the truth full well, but of what use to trouble her girls before the time.

They were gathered round the fire in their little sitting-room, the night of Mona's meeting with Mr. Fenton. Most people in Sidney-place had given up fire, but Mrs. Rose was always cold and shivering, and the twins would have gone hungry rather than she should have suffered any pain they could spare her.

She sat leaning back in her easy chair, a sweet-faced woman, and a pretty one, despite



[RONALD SHUDDERED, AS WORD FOR WORD MR. DAY'S DESCRIPTION APPLIED TO MRS. DIXON.]

her thin, pinched face, and hectic colour. Of the sisters Elfy was most like her. She was the beauty of the family, a lovely girl with golden hair and large, bright eyes. Mona had locks of darkest brown, and dark hazel eyes. She was altogether on a larger scale than Elfy. Mona was not tall, but then her sister was so small as to be almost fairy-like in her appearance, to which, no doubt, she originally owed her pet name.

Elfy too was the mother's favourite. She loved both her girls, but the golden-haired beauty was her darling. Mona felt this without resenting it. She herself thought of Elfy always as a precious charge to be guarded against all sorrow.

"Mother," said the younger girl, slowly, as Mona, who was by a few minutes the senior of the twins, removed the tea-tray. "Mother, I have some bad news for you. Miss Elkins won't want me after the holidays."

Mona put down the tray she was holding in speechless dismay. Twenty-five pounds a-year and dinner five days a-week may not seem a large amount, but it was a great part of their income. Elfy looked at her sister and burst into tears.

"I couldn't help it, Mona. Miss Elkins herself says it is not my fault, but I look so young, and one of the parents declares her daughter must have an older teacher. You know it was the agreement I might be dismissed at the end of any quarter, and so—"

Mona kissed her fondly.

"It will all come right, Elfy. Don't fret, dear," but the while she was thinking of Mrs. Cooper's offer if only it could be transferred to Elfy, and if her mother would spare her favourite what a happy, easeful home there might be at Plymouth for her little sister.

Mrs. Rose waited a moment before she spoke, and then her words seemed strange to the girls.

"It does not matter, darling. I never liked your being at that school, it was not good

enough for you. Very soon, I hope, you will neither of you need to toil so hard."

"Mother! have you found a gold mine?" asked Mona, cheerfully.

"No; but, my dear, when one is very near death, pride seems all crushed. I can bear now what I would have died rather than endure a few months ago. You are not quite alone in the world, my darlings. My mother disapproved of my marriage; she said some harsh things to me because your father was poor, but she was a good, tender-hearted woman always. She will befriend my children for my sake. She is rich, Mona, and can either give you a home with her or provide for you both elsewhere. Dears, I am going to leave you, and I can't go knowing you are all lonely and friendless. I thought once I could never ask aught of my mother after the past, but for your sakes."

"Mother," pleaded Mona, "we don't want money, we don't want our grandmother's charity if only we can keep you. We are quite happy so long as we have you."

"But I must leave you, dears. The doctor came to-day, and he said the end was very near. I have put off writing to my mother long enough, the letter shall go to-night; she always loved me. She must be getting old now, and she may have learned money is not all. The man who turned her heart away from me may be dead. Any way, she is too kind to leave her grandchildren in want. Elfy give me a pen. Don't try to dissuade me, Mona. Children, could I meet your father and tell him I had left you friendless and alone when an effort of mine might have given you a home?"

"Mother," whispered Mona, "don't write, I can work a little harder, and I will take care of Elfy."

"Mother," pleaded the younger girl, "is grandmother rich? Does she live in a house of her own?"

"She is very rich," replied Mrs. Rose,

"and she lives in the country. Mona, why do you disobey me? Bring pen and ink; I will write now."

They raised her in her chair. Mona placed a pillow at her back, Elfy brought writing materials, and the letter was begun.

It proved a difficult one to write. Once, twice Mrs. Rose tore up her efforts and began afresh. At last she was satisfied.

"You will take this letter, Elfy, when I am gone, and give it into your grandmother's own hand. She will need no proof of your story, dear, for you are my image—the very picture of what I was when I left home."

She stopped abruptly. Her face grew white, her head fell back. Alarmed, the twins applied restoratives, thinking she had fainted. Then Mona put on her hat and cloak and rushed for the doctor, a strange dread at her heart.

And Mr. Sparks could only confirm it when he returned with her. Mrs. Rose had died of heart disease. He had warned her any sudden excitement might be fatal.

"But it has only hastened the end," he said, kindly. "In any case she could not have lived many weeks. Can I do nothing for you? Is there any relation I can send for?"

"Our grandmother," answered Elfy. "Mamma was writing to her just before the end."

Reverently, Mona took up the letter. It seemed almost sacrilege to read it; but the envelope was undirected, and how else could they discover the whereabouts of their unknown relative?

Mona read the letter through from beginning to end, then she put it down, and said, in a strange, hushed tone,—

"It tells us nothing, Elfy. There is no name or address mentioned. We know no more of our grandmother than we did before mamma told us her story."

(To be continued.)



[AS ALIX WAS PASSING, D'EYNOCOURT SAID, "DO YOU MIND SPARING ME A MINUTE?"]

NOVELLITE.]

BUT—THAT TEMPER OF HERS.

CHAPTER I.

AN INVITATION.

THAT WAS how every discussion of poor Lady Alix was ended, and really it was little wonder, for if she had the beauty of an angel she had the temper of a fury. There was no denying it, she was a downright termagant. Cross her will, or even her whim, and the house, big as it was, would scarcely hold more than herself.

She had a fresh maid every month, and was seldom ever attended by the same groom more than a dozen times.

As to her father, the Earl of Riverdale, there were days when he and his daughter only met at dinner, and then did not exchange a word. To be sure, that was partly his own fault.

He had almost forgotten his child when she was in the nursery and schoolroom; but as soon as she made a sensation in the London world he was perpetually interfering with her, ordering her, and trying to secure for her nothing less than strawberry leaves.

The result was rebellion, and such a home that the Earl wished twenty times a day some one would be bold enough to brave the outrageous temper he had transmitted to his girl, and Alix vowed she would run away or marry a gamekeeper.

Needless to say there was no mother. The poor child had been left to servants and governesses, the first of whom bullied and toadied alternately, and the last were chosen haphazard and always being changed.

Alix grew up a beauty, a despot, and deplorably ignorant. She had never, to anyone's knowledge, shown an atom of heart

except in one way, she loved her horse and her dogs.

"For all that she's as hard as—a brick-bat," said Harry Hazeldean to his dearest friend, the young Viscount D'Eyncourt.

They were in Switzerland, and it was a wet day, so they had nothing to do but to gossip; the ascent of the Matterhorn being, of course, impossible.

"Nobody's quite invulnerable who loves a dog," said the Viscount. "I met her at the latter end of the season, you know."

"Yes, I was rather afraid she had captivated you."

"What! with that temper? I! used to my mother's gentleness! Besides, I'm an ineligible, I'm as poor as a rat unless my uncle chooses to leave me his big fortune—may the day be far off! There's nobody on earth so hampered and out of place as a poor peer, Harry."

"That's true, old fellow," said untitled Harry, with sympathy. "I'm rather puzzled about the Earl's invitation to you to Riverdale."

"Are you? Why?"

"Don't open your blue eyes like that, D'Eyncourt. You must know you're a taking fellow."

"I suppose so, since all the mammas fight shy of me."

"The Earl intends his daughter to marry money."

"Naturally. They are poor also."

"And a higher rank than his own."

"Exactly, my son," said D'Eyncourt; "but what is that to do with it? Hearts are not hands. He knows I couldn't marry without money, and I'm pretty certain he thinks that girl of his would never dare to fly in his face seriously, though she does it every day of her life. Then she snubbed me unmercifully."

"She snubs every one, especially the Duke of Downham. That's the man the Earl wants to get hold of for her."

"Yes, I thought as much by the way she

treated him. Mother tells me Lady Alix has declared she'll only marry the man she hates, to torment him to death, I suppose. I think she is to be pitied, you know."

"Oh, come, D'Eyncourt, there spoke your mother. A girl who makes everyone miserable!"

"I daresay she's dencedly miserable herself," said the young Viscount. "Haven't they got some splendid preserves there?"

"Yes, you will enjoy the shooting, if indoors is unbearable. They don't get their house easily filled," said Harry.

"Perhaps that's why they've asked me," said D'Eyncourt.

Viscount D'Eyncourt did not live in chambers—he lived with his mother in a house in Hill-street.

He was in the habit of saying, being exceedingly frank about his poverty, that he couldn't afford two establishments, and to his intimates acknowledged that he believed his mother would break her heart if he went into chambers.

"You're not so free," said Hazeldean, who was the young lord's particular chum, as they sped up to town after that Swiss journey. The subject had somehow come up.

"Oh, yes, I am quite as free as I want to be."

"It wouldn't do for some fellows," said Harry, "but you've some awfully particular notions of duty, my son."

"It does for me, and that's the only thing of consequence. Here's Charing Cross, I declare I'm glad to see it."

"Glad our trip is over? And yet you've enjoyed it. Or is it Lady Alix?" said Harry, slyly.

"Oh, no, it's the mater," said the Viscount, laughing boyishly.

Then the two men bade each other good-bye, and in a very short time Lady D'Eyncourt held her tall son in her arms. Then she gave him some tea in her own sanctum, which was what this young man especially

liked, sharing the male weakness for petting and fussing.

"You got the letters I forwarded before you left?" asked Lady D'Eyncourt.

She looked like her son's elder sister, she was so fair and young; she had married at eighteen certainly.

"The last batch, with Lord Riverdale's letter? Yes, mother, thanks. He wants me to go down there," looking down while she said this.

"I heard they were making up a party," said Lady D'Eyncourt. "Do you think of going?"

"I did think of it; I hadn't made up my mind."

He brought his empty cup to the table, and saw that his mother was looking slightly troubled.

"What's the matter, mater?" he said.

"You must do as you like, my dear," she said, looking up; "but, you know, I don't think you will enjoy being there. It's a disorderly house—the Earl is master and mistress too, and poor Alix is mistress also; there are always disputes. I wouldn't be asking for the world"—and, indeed, she had never been known to speak an evil word of anyone, but a mother with an only son, who is erratic and romantic, may sometimes forget her charity in warning him off matrimonial chances—"but that child has an awful temper. It's not entirely her fault; she has no mother, and she's not been brought up at all, but that doesn't alter the fact."

The Viscount smiled to himself.

"My dear mater," he thought, "is in a blue fright about me, and she tells me this girl has a fiendish temper—that's what her 'awful' would mean with anyone else—and then spoils it by exonerating the fault."

"Well, mother," aloud, "the shooting tempts me rather. Hazeldean says they have jolly preserves; I needn't see much of Lady Alix, the evenings are short when we are out shooting all day."

"Yes, dear, that's true—"

"But you hesitate, mater. What else?"

"I'm afraid," said Lady D'Eyncourt, with great reluctance, "that the Earl is just making a convenience of you."

"That's what Harry said."

"Did he? And the Earl won't have had shots, they say, and you are what you call a crack shot."

"So you think my pride ought to take fire. I am afraid I am not very proud. I think I'll try it, and I can outshoot the visit if I like. They haven't said any particular time. It's rather a shame to leave you so soon again."

"That doesn't matter at all," she said, "I have plenty of friends. I shall be visiting myself, and I never will be a check on you. A young fellow has so many engagements. Well, then, you go down to the Riverdales?"

"Yes, mother, the second week in September."

CHAPTER II.

AT RIVERDALE.

Now Harry Hazeldean and even unworldly Lady D'Eyncourt had rather bit the truth when they said the Viscount had been asked to Riverdale to suit the Earl's convenience. As Lady Alix had not wanted the party at all, she had made herself as disagreeable as she possibly could before they arrived. She deliberately left out the Duke of Downham, whom her father had bade her invite, and the omission was only found out when a trap was to leave for the station to fetch the Duke, and it then transpired that his Grace was in Norway, or the Rockies, or Bombay. Result—an explosion, and the house was still full of the flying debris when the first arrivals were due.

The first of all happened to be that handsome ineligible, Viscount D'Eyncourt. Now, Alix had heaped him in the general condemnation; she had had no choice about the guests;

she had snubbed this one because she had seen an inclination in him to single her out, so when the footman threw open the door announcing, "Viscount D'Eyncourt," she moved forward just two steps and held out the like number of fingers.

"Excuse my left hand, Lady Alix," said she Viscount, bowing over the two fingers as if they had been the whole hand. It was the whole hand the next minute, for her eyes went rapidly to the silken sling that supported his right arm.

"What! you are hurt!" she said.

Not in a hard voice, not with stiff lips—the pretty fingers forgot to withdraw themselves. Happy Viscount!

"You were so very well when I saw you last! And how languid he looked now! Had he always been so pale? Then she drew herself up suddenly, formal and cold again.

"I have been doing the Matterhorn," said D'Eyncourt, "and so I did, but in coming down there was an accident. Some of us slipped; happily, no one else was injured."

"I saw nothing of it in the papers."

"It was in *Truth*, I think—nothing escapes the societies."

"And how were you injured?" said Lady Alix, with polite interest.

"Fractured the arm in two places; but you are too kind, Lady Alix."

"Not at all. I hope the doctors give good hopes."

"I don't know," said the Viscount, with rather a troubled look. "It was a horrid business, and they think it will never be much use to me."

"I am very sorry. And you will miss the shooting," said Lady Alix.

"Mr. and Mrs. Maine," announced the footman. Mrs. Maine was a charming little woman, not long married, very lively, a good deal of a flirt, but devoted to her husband, who had himself two devoted ones instead of her one—to his gun and his wife; and he was not always certain what was the arrangement of the two words. He certainly would have gone to a hovel ruled over by a criminal, if one could imagine wall kept preserves as an appanage of such a place.

Lady Alix received these two much as she had at first received Lord D'Eyncourt. The little lady got a much warmer greeting from the young peer.

"How do do, D'Eyncourt?" she said, "your left hand! You had fellow! What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Slipped mountaineering," said the Viscount, briefly.

"I heard something about it. Jack, they were telling you at the club, weren't they? Somebody had seen it in *Truth*. I went to Hill-street to see your mother about it, but she had left—gone to Scotland."

"She left before I did," said D'Eyncourt. "Very good of you to take the trouble to inquire about it."

"Oh, you're such an old friend," said Lottie, for she and the Viscount had done a lot of sitting and dancing together, and were capital friends.

They strolled up to the great oriel window while Alix went to receive more guests.

"Shouldn't have come if it hadn't been for Jack," said Lottie, confidentially. "He wouldn't miss the shooting, and he hates going without me; but it's a horrid house."

"So I hear on all hands."

"What made you come? You could so easily have excused yourself with that disabled arm."

"I heard such a lot about this house, in an adverse sense that I thought I'd like to see for myself," said the Viscount.

"D'Eyncourt! Don't you be hankering after Alix. You know you were inclined to be sweet upon her up in town."

"And you're jealous?" said D'Eyncourt, laughing.

"No. I'm not—not a bit, but you men are such fools—the best of you, and I will say you're one of the best; but you're easily taken

by beauty, and I'm afraid you've got your mother's soft heart."

"And pity is akin to love, eh?"

"It is, of course, though I could never see why Alix should be so pitied. I'll bet you anything you like she's been turning the house topsy-turvy to-day. I can feel it in the atmosphere. The dinner will be odious."

"Hasn't the Earl a good cook, then?" said she, gravely.

"You know that's not what I mean. Don't be aggravating. I wasn't talking of dinner in a culinary sense. Is that tea? I'm dying for some, though I know it will choke me."

"Why? I was going to fetch you some, but if that is to be its effect—"

"You're laughing at me, I know," said Lottie, seating herself in the broad window seat. "But she doesn't want us, and tea being grudged is choking stuff."

"I don't think she'd mind my bringing you some tea," said the Viscount, still very gravely, and went off to fetch it, waiting on Lottie with more deftness than could have been expected from a man who had injured his right hand.

The Earl did not appear till they were all assembled in the drawing room for dinner, and then he came in and gave a hearty greeting to his guests.

"Only because Alix did the opposite," whispered Mrs. Maine to D'Eyncourt.

Then came dinner, which to-night was a funeral meal. Lady Alix never opened her lips save for table courtesies, sitting in her place as if she were there only to be looked at.

She was worth looking at, no doubt, with her dark, rich beauty, but she rather spoilt herself to-night by knitting her delicate brows and keeping her lips in a disdainful curve.

The Earl tried to make amends for his daughter's silence, but he was not a conversationalist, and nobody helped him. Everyone felt sat on, even the irrepressible Viscount, who had sang-froid enough for a dozen.

In the drawing room it was simply awful till the men came in. Then the handsome invalid was made much of and commiserated. He made a sort of safety valve for the ladies' pent-up tongues and feelings.

Alix sat immovable, doing no work, speaking not at all, with her hands held in her lap. There was a little contempt in the dark eyes that looked about her. She thought the women silly. Why didn't they let the Viscount alone? Perhaps he liked all that nonsense. Nobody noticed that it was not altogether a contemptuous glance that followed the recipient of these attentions.

"Lady Alix, I know you sing."

He was at her side, leaning his left hand on the high back of her chair.

"I would rather not sing to-night," she said, coldly.

"Mayn't I persuade you?" in the most insinuating way he could manage. "I will be content with one song."

"I shall not sing to-night."

"That was all he got. 'I shall not,' rude decidedly. It was that temper of hers, of course."

He took his rebuff gracefully and left her. Other people played and sang, he among them, for he had a delicious voice, and was always in great request.

Everybody was glad when the evening came to an end, and the men in the smoking-room said she was a regular minx, and the women among themselves that she was a piece of ice, and really one would think they were not wanted.

The piece of ice, however, was at that moment sobbing in her room. For the result of her tantrums had been a savage reproof from her father.

"If you can't make yourself agreeable to my guests keep to your room," he had said.

"I shall do no such thing. I told you I wouldn't put myself out. I didn't want them. You chose to invite them without consulting me in the least," Alix retorted.

Then there had been high words, heard by

the servants as they passed the door from the dining-room, and repeated by the ladies' maids to their mistresses.

Everyone knew all about it, even D'Eyncourt heard of it from his man—a quiet fellow, very fond of his young master, and who had been with him some years. My lord didn't sleep well that night. He was apt to lie awake if anything worried him; but, perhaps, his arm was painful; at any rate he said it was the next morning when he was one of the last in the breakfast-room.

Lady Alix, who had been setting in her rigid way at the table, turned to him as he came in, and Lottie's question drew from him the explanation. Glancing up, the Viscount caught her looking at him pityingly, but she had no idea she was noticed. He took care to drop his long lashes discreetly.

"Was he fond of dogs?" Lady Alix inquired, not so coldly as usual. "Would he care to come and see the kennels?"

"The Viscount was not 'charmed,'" he should only be "very pleased," and followed her to the kennels.

The beauties came springing round her, hoking her hands and face, and she seemed to forget herself, and caressed them with fond words. Her face had lighted up, glowing in beauty and warmth. The Viscount, leaning against the railing, looked down on her and the dogs, biting his lip. What a waste of love it seemed to him, fond as he was of dogs.

"They're beauties," he said, stooping to one of them who was a young dog and so friendly that he instantly jumped up with his forepaws on D'Eyncourt's breast.

"Oh, take care," said the girl, starting up, "Roy is so rough, Lord D'Eyncourt, he will hurt your arm."

"Yes, perhaps he will," said the Viscount, gently, displacing the dog. "Down, Roy!"

"They're making up a shooting-party," said Alix, when they had been with the dogs. "I'm afraid it will be very dull for you."

"Oh, not at all, I enjoy the rest. Are you going to join the party at luncheon?"

"No, your friend, Mrs. Maine, is. Perhaps you would like to walk down with her?"

The Viscount said he thought he would, and they sauntered back to the house, Alix, as if she repented her slight advance, becoming again silent.

"Yes, I'm going," said Lottie, when D'Eyncourt applied to her. There was the slightest toss of her head. "I can't stand this house. If it were not for you I should make Jack have a telegram. They were quarrelling again this morning. It was lucky you were late at breakfast. How you will put up with it, I can't tell."

"I don't think she's happy," said the Viscount, irrelevantly, and walked away, while Lottie stared after him.

CHAPTER III.

OVER A RUNAWAY HORSE.

It was very unjust of Alix to laugh at the other ladies' silliness in spoiling Viscount D'Eyncourt, for though she did not altogether recognise the fact, and would not have owned to it if she had, she was just as much interested by his semi-invalidism.

She persuaded herself that he was paler than she had ever seen him before, she commiserated his inability to shoot, she did everything she could think of to assure his being properly waited on, and thought of a hundred little plans to make his visit less dull.

She never guessed, of course, indeed she was often barely civil, and a lot of her plans were never put into execution, but she allowed the Viscount to stroll with her in the gardens, to accompany her visits to the dogs, and to be with her more than the other men.

It was a wonder that the Viscount found any pleasure in these privileges, granted by Alix for the express purpose of lightening

tedium; for she was rarely talkative and generally snubbed him.

"But you know I'm uncommonly like an india-rubber ball," said the young man, to Lottie Maine. "I rebound from every blow."

"My dear fellow, your *tête-à-tête* with Alix seem to me the essence of dullness," said Lottie.

"They're not *tête-à-tête*."

"No? Well it's true I never can make out what you talk about—nothing at all, I believe. What are you up to, D'Eyncourt? You're playing a dangerous game."

"I am not playing a game at all," said he. "I am simply asked here on a visit. I have got myself stupidly laid up meanwhile, and don't like to withdraw my acceptance—can't shoot, ride, drive, or play tennis, and so I am thrown on my hostess's hand—*voilà tout*. Of course a romantic little puss such as you puts another colour on it."

"Well!" said Lottie, simply opening mouth and eyes as wide as they would go. "Of all the impudent cool hands you are the worst. Do you know how to blush—or to falter—or to tell the truth?"

"I learnt the Ten Commandments and the Catechism," said he, with immovable gravity. "I don't know what I've said that afflicts you."

"I don't quite know myself, but I shall find out. I haven't fathomed you entirely yet," said Lottie. "There's Jack calling me, and I must be off."

And when she was off the young Viscount's face changed. He bent his head on his hand and glanced down at his disabled arm.

"I don't know but Lottie is right," he said to himself. "Strikes me I'm doing a stupid thing. I'm disgustingly poor—no is she for the matter of that. Then what will the matter say? she hasn't answered my letter yet. Poor matter! but on my life I can't help it! I shall have to give up going with her to see those dogs. If she'd only give me one of the soft words she throws away on them! She does snub me awfully—she isn't half so hangry to the other men."

Here he pulled his moustache—a particularly killing one, silky and drooping—and said, "H'm!" with a slight smile, curiously tender, in his blue eyes.

"Poor child! how miserable she is!" So you have your mother's heart after all, as your lively little friend told you, and this is what your silent walks with beautiful, icy Alix come to; that you are more deeply in love than ever just because you are so sure she is perfectly unhappy. And you think, with the splendid assurance of youth, that you could make her as perfectly happy. You are certain that temper of hers will never make a moment's ruffin in the domestic sea, you are not the least afraid of it. You only long to take her to your heart, to hear her whisper she loves you—there will be nothing more to wish for under the sun. But you sigh now; you haven't made a single step, unless it is that haughtiness of hers.

A light step, the rustle of a woman's dress; he started up.

"I was afraid you were in pain," said Lady Alix, standing a little way from him, looking at him with large, concerned eyes. "Are you sure your man dresses your arm properly? You don't seem to improve."

"No, in spite of all your kind care. It isn't my man's fault, he won the approval of the doctors. Are you going out?" for she was wearing her hat and buttoning her driving gloves.

To see her do the last went to the Viscount's heart. He was so deft a squeeze of dames; no ladies' maid fastened a ten-button glove more swiftly than he.

"I am going to drive," said Alix. "I came to see if you would care to go."

"Of course, I should be delighted."

In five minutes he had handed Alix into her pony-chaise, with its spirited high-stepping bay, followed her, and she had gathered up

the reins and driven smartly down the long avenue out into the country road.

He was supremely happy, although he was such a crack whip and couldn't handle the ribbons, yet he said, half laughing, half sighing,—

"I'm afraid the doctors were right, I shall never be the same again."

"Oh! don't say that!" exclaimed Alix, growing suddenly white. "It is so hard for you!"

"Not if you give it a pitying thought," he said, gently.

She shrugged her shoulders, and bit her lip angrily.

"I—oh, I pity no one," she said. "Health is a great thing of course, but you have no cause to complain."

"I ought not to at any rate," said he, in the same gentle way.

Then she bit her lip harder still, and looked out very steadily before her. After that she said nothing at all.

But still he had her all to himself through these lovely country lanes, and under the chequered light and shade of trees—no other fellow near her; the Duke of Downham, of whom he was half jealous, though he had never seen him, far away.

Yes, it was a delicious drive, for love wants next to nothing to feed on, so long as it has its own high hopes.

"I hope you won't be tired," said Lady Alix, as they turned to go home.

It was growing a little dark now, and she was driving quickly, for they were rather late. She did not turn to him, and her voice sounded formal.

"It won't matter if I am," said the Viscount. "Hallo! what's Champion up to?"

Champion suddenly began tearing along the level road after giving a tremendous jump aside from some dark object.

Alix's firm hands closed on the reins like a vice. She threw her head up and set her teeth.

"It's all right if he keeps to this road," she said. "He'll soon tire."

"And if he doesn't keep to it?" said D'Eyncourt, quickly.

How he cursed that useless right arm of his. But he could see Alix was managing superbly, and was not a bit frightened.

"It forks off to the river," she said; while Champion bent his head down for a fresh lease of running. A blinding minute of this breathless speed—then the white road came in sight that branched off to the river—straight on to the bank; and Champion began to prance and swerve from side to side beyond Alix's strength to control. D'Eyncourt, watching his moment, suddenly seized the reins with his left hand. Champion sprang aside, swept past the turning, then stopped abruptly, almost overturning the carriage and its occupants.

They scarcely knew how they got out safely, but there stood Champion in the road, cropping and ashamed of himself, while his young mistress leant against the Viscount, drawing her breath heavily.

"You are not hurt?" he said, bending over her, speaking he scarcely knew how tenderly; but he was thrown a little off his balance by feeling her cling to his support.

She drew herself away at the question, and lifted her eyes, soft and grateful, to his.

"Oh, no, only a little bruised; but you," she said, and laid her hand on his injured arm. How the light touch thrilled him!

"It's not hurt at all," he said. "I am only so afraid for you; but you were very brave."

"Was I? I felt—very cowardly," said poor Alix, and walked away to the carriage, flashing painfully.

He could not see that, of course, and he did not quite understand her words. If he had the earth would have seemed heaven. As she did not understand her feeling herself, however, she perhaps could not easily convey it to him.

"If you'll get in, Lady Alix," he said, following her, "I'll lead Champion a little way, and then you must let me drive him."

"He pulls so," said Alix, "you want both hands for him. Pray don't."

"Oh, he won't pull now, poor fellow," said the Viscount, caressing Champion, "he'll go home like a lamb."

"I think I'd rather drive myself," said Alix.

Now the Viscount knew quite enough of women to know this: that no woman born would think better of him for giving in on such an occasion, or the less of him for being unreasonably afraid for her. So he said, not as setting her down, but in his gentlest way—

"I couldn't think of letting you," and went to the horse's head as if the matter was settled.

And so it was, for Alix did not offer a word, but sat with her hands locked on her knees, and her large eyes turned up towards the sky above her.

Poor child! what a battle she was fighting inch by inch. Do you suppose she had had no feeling about it when he held her so tenderly, as something precious; when he made her yield to him?

Then her eyes would drop to the tall figure, looking shadowy in the deepening gloom, walking at the horse's head. What care he took of her; but, of course, so he would of any woman placed temporarily under his charge.

Suddenly Champion stopped, drooping his head and laying down his ears.

"I think he'll go all right now," said the Viscount, stepping into the phaeton, and gathering up the reins that Alix had been just holding.

A gentle word to Champion, and the horse got into a quiet trot that certainly my Lord D'Eyncourt did not want quickened.

"You are better?" he said, presently, bending towards his companion. In answer to which Alix's haughtiness resolved into a steady looking away from him, and a low-toned,—

"Yes, thank you," which were the last words spoken between them during the drive.

However, let any young man get himself into the Viscount's position, and he will then understand why words are not necessary to produce the most heavenly contentment. He got a little more too when they pulled up before the hall door, and a groom was holding Champion while the Viscount gave Lady Alix his hand to get out of the phaeton. He dared not keep her the eighth part of a second beyond the proper time—it was she who left her hand in his, as it were, and lifting her eyes to his face he just caught a glimpse of what might lie beneath her iciness.

She said nothing but "Thank you," which is said all over the world about every minute, so why it should make the young Viscount stammer like a schoolboy when he answered her is a problem only a lover could solve. Then Alix went indoors, and he stood still on the steps, thrilled to the heart by the soft pressure of the one hand among the millions just as fair he wanted for his own.

CHAPTER IV.

"IN DEAD EARNEST."

POOR VISCOUNT! He didn't lie awake all night, as if he were a melodramatic hero, but slept as well as youth and health generally does; but he woke, unfortunately, with a springing hope that was destined to be cruelly destroyed. For when he went downstairs, feeling as if he had arranged his work very prettily yesterday, behold Alix belonged not to yesterday at all. She was once more ice, and not even of her former consistency, but the sort of ice you may find on the Neva in midwinter.

For once in his sunny life our Viscount was so cast down that he hadn't even the spirit to try and thaw her. Perhaps he felt that

she couldn't be thawed. He knew Lottie was noticing him during the formal "Good-morning," and inquiries, but he did not look at her—he was a little afraid of her just now.

He was the more disconsolate because his fortnight was drawing to a close, and if that was her humour goodbye to Riverdale sharp to his time.

The letters did not improve matters, for there was a long one from his mother which he took out on the terrace to read along with his cigarette. The letter was full of the wisest, kindest advice—a trifle reproachful here and there, but ended in the resigned spirit familiar to mothers with an only and somewhat self-willed son. The young man smiled and sighed too, when he had finished it.

"It's too late, you dearest of mothers," he said. "I'm afraid it always was. I knew you'd do as I asked. Hello, Lottie!" jumping up to give her his chair. "What's brought you?"

Lottie sank into the chair while he folded up his letter, and leant against the balustrade.

"Love letter?" said she.

"Oh, no—don't read those in public, you know."

"Suppose not. Now, Claude, confess—what is the matter with you?"

"Claude," meant business, he knew. It did not appear that Alix had said anything about yesterday's adventure, so he couldn't fall back on that.

"You're horribly unreasonable, Lottie," said he. "You expect a fellow to be up to everything when he's worried with pain and a bad night."

"Poor fellow! You've had a horrid job with that accident," said Lottie, in genuine pity, but at the same time a quick glance at his face. "But you're a regular Spartan for pain."

"That's very fine. I never had such a lot of it before. Oh, headaches, when I was reading for a double first. I remember those; but they weren't perpetual."

"Besides, you were all brain, then," said Lottie, thoughtfully. "You didn't think about your heart at all."

"I think I'd forgotten you for the time," said the Viscount, mischievously.

"Now, Claude, that's too bad to turn the tables on me like that. I'll make you confess if only to punish you. I knew you'd a weakness for ices—but ices!"

"Nothing so lovely. Get Jack to take you to Niagara and you'll see," said D'Eyncourt, unmoved.

"Thanks much, I don't need to cross the Atlantic for that. I can see ices in perfection nearer home. Come, Claude, you can't deceive me. It is very unkind of you to try and keep me in the dark."

"I hope Jack is out of the way," said the Viscount, with comical alarm. "I don't know what he'd do if he saw you flirting with me at this rate."

"He'd not do anything. He'd say I'd better flirt with you than with somebody else. But he's gone to the kennels. Claude, you know it won't do. Pray, be careful, there's a dear fellow."

She looked so concerned that he began to relent.

"What won't do, Lottie?" turning slightly aside.

"Why, Alix, of course!"

"Oh, Alix, and of course!"

"Well, you know what a temper she has!"

"Certainly, I've seen it heaps of times."

"Claude!" Lottie stopped perplexed and breathless, for she really didn't know what to make of him, standing there with an amused smile in his blue eyes and quivering over his lips. "It is no good to stand and laugh, and think you can come over me as you do over that mother of yours," said Lottie, energetically. "You're perfectly spoiled, you think you're quite irresistible," and as she collapsed, the Viscount broke out laughing. Lottie got

up and swept from the terrace. "As if I couldn't see!" she said, disdainfully, over her shoulder.

The Viscount, still laughing, strolled in the opposite direction, and near the library windows suddenly stopped short.

"I shall ask D'Eyncourt to stay another week or so," in a decided man's voice, from the library.

D'Eyncourt may be forgiven for not moving immediately. He was absorbed in listening for the answer, and when it came—

"I'd rather he went," in the girlish voice he was waiting for. "You consult my wishes in nothing."

"You never consult mine. You deliberately disobeyed me about the Duke. I shall certainly ask D'Eyncourt."

The voice came nearer the window, and the Viscount reversed the movement. When the Earl emerged on to the terrace his innocent young guest was sitting on the balustrade too far for even King Midas to have eaves-dropped.

"Well, D'Eyncourt," said the Earl, with great friendliness, "how does Riverdale get you on?"

"Capitally!" was the cheerful answer.

"You couldn't spare us another week or so, would you?"

"You are very kind, Lord Riverdale. I should like it very much, but I fancy I shall clash with another engagement."

Certainly the Ten Commandments and the Catechism didn't seem to have been much use to the Viscount.

"Put it off, can't you?"

"You wouldn't be so pressing if you didn't want to spite that poor child," thought the young man, savagely, and he said, with the most charming urbanity, "If you'll allow me to defer my reply for a short time I'll look at my dates."

"Do so, pray—I shall be very pleased if you can remain," and the Earl passed on.

D'Eyncourt couldn't come across Alix till later, very near luncheon time, when the outdoor people would be returning. She was just coming out of the library as he was going in to find her. She was passing him when he said, smiling—

"Do you mind sparing me a minute?"

Alix stepped back into the room; a more uninviting aspect than hers could not well be imagined.

"Your father," began the Viscount, who was nothing if he were not courageous, "has asked me to extend my visit. I ought to explain that I unfortunately overheard a few words between you and your father in which I seemed mixed up. In any case I could not decide without referring to you."

She stood like a statue.

"I have made an excuse to delay my reply," D'Eyncourt went on, "What is to be?"

"What you please," she said, haughtily.

"It has nothing to do with me."

"Yet I think you objected to an extension of the invitation," said the Viscount, quietly.

"Lord D'Eyncourt!" she exclaimed, passionately. "You had no right to hear what I said! Besides, what then? Perhaps I thought this is not a pleasant house to stay at; that you, an invalid," she began to get sarcastic, "would not have enough care and attention. There will be very few of the others remaining either, so you see I considered you and not—"

"Yourself," put in the Viscount, calmly.

"I told you it is nothing to me," she said, still more angrily.

"I crave pardon—I thought I overheard you say something about your preferring me to go."

Something had roused her almost beyond control. She flashed out—

"So I did—so I do."

"I am sorry. Why?"

"Because I hate you!"

She swept away, leaving him standing smiling to himself.

"What a spiteful! So you hate me, lady

mine! And you want me to go very much. You said so to that obstinate old father of yours. What an odd thing it is you two never agree. He wants me to stay without doubt. And I shall stay."

Alix showed no feeling of any sort when she met him next morning. He should have gone, but even he could not tell whether she was vexed, pleased, or indifferent, to see him in his usual place at the breakfast-table. Did she repent of her rude speech—an outrageous speech from a hostess to her guest? He could not decide—the only thing he noticed was that she rarely looked at him during the meal.

The Earl, delighted at having, as he thought, conquered his daughter about Lord D'Eyncourt, went a step further. He telegraphed an invitation to the Duke of Downham, who was not, after all, farther than the Green Isle, to join the now diminished party at Riverdale. The Duke's answer appeared in the words he addressed to his daughter.

"Alix, I have told Mrs. Henley to have a suite of rooms prepared for Downham. I expect him to-morrow."

Everyone was assembled for afternoon tea, and everyone looked up—at the Earl, at Lady Alix, and round the room. Alix was the only one who did not stir—she sat immovable. When it was necessary to offer a trivial civility she could not speak—she only looked round at D'Eyncourt, standing behind her, who at once took the duty on himself. In doing so he had to pass Lottie, and under pretences of fetching her cup, whispered,—

"For Heaven's sake go and take Alix's place."

"My dear fellow, so marked!"

"Oh, you can manage it. Women always can."

Lottie flashed a look up at him full of comprehension, and then got up, and by some clever management had done what he asked, for he saw Alix flit out by the window.

Then tongues were loosed. "Extraordinary people!" "Unheard of thing to flout her so openly!" "Don't wonder," others said, "with such a temper as that one must do things first and tell her afterwards!"

D'Eyncourt heard all this, divided between rage against the Earl and tumultuous joy at the girl's mute confidence in him. He knew he had betrayed himself to Lottie, but that was no matter. If he only dared follow Alix!

"Poor girl!" said big Jack Maine, pityingly.

"Very fine, Jack," said Harry Delmont; "but I think I shall go in a day or two. Downham isn't worth stopping for, and if my lady is going to treat him as she can if she likes, it'll be unbearable."

"We haven't beaten all the coverts," said Jack, as if that fact made every disagreeable nowhere.

Yesterday Lottie would have wanted to go, to-day she glanced at D'Eyncourt, and was silent. Had he taken leave of his senses to dream of that termagant girl? And yet with all his Quixotism he had such quick wits and more common sense than most people.

"Still brains are of very little assistance to a man in love," argued the young woman. "I can't let him remain here by himself. He's quite capable of running off with my lady in spite of his broken arm!"

"What's Downham coming for?" she said, aloud. "In town we used to think he was after Lady Alix."

"The Earl wanted to make a match, there's no doubt," said Miss Delmont, Harry's sister. "The Duke wasn't the obstacle, it was the other contracting party."

"Very rash of the Duke," Jack said.

"Oh, don't you know," said Miss Delmont, "he told some men at the club that he wasn't afraid of Lady Alix. He'd soon break her spirit!"

"Did he indeed!" said Lottie, scornfully, for somehow she pitied Alix more than she knew. Her eyes followed D'Eyncourt, who had turned rather sharply to the window,

though he had not been in the group around Miss Delmont.

Lottie saw him presently step outside, and almost directly followed him, leaving the others so deep in gossip that they hardly noticed the absence of two of their number.

D'Eyncourt, leaning over the balustrade, turned his head as she came up.

"Oh, you!" he said, there was a frown on his brow, a quiver of the lip that Lottie knew to be anger, not wounded feeling.

"That's not complimentary," she said, sweetly.

"What's that idiot Downham coming for!" said the Viscount, as savagely as if poor Lottie had been responsible, "if he really said that he's a confounded cad!"

"My dear boy," said Lottie, "I'm afraid you're very hard, but—"

"There—don't laugh at me—there's a good child," said D'Eyncourt. "It's maddening to see her treated like that! I don't wonder at her temper, if that's what they've done all her life! She's wretchedly unhappy. I know she is! She's sobbing her heart out somewhere now, I dare swear!"

"D'Eyncourt, don't go too far! Alix hasn't heart enough to cry, and remember there's another side to the shield."

"Nonsense! Do you mean to tell me if my mother had brought her up, she wouldn't have been different? It's only your placid fools who can be taken the wrong way and be double distilled angels all the same! It's your fine people with nerves and hearts, that are made devils of."

"The implication—"

"Lottie," said the Viscount, "I'm in deep earnest. You mustn't take me up like that! What's the use? I shouldn't be worth anything if you could make me waver for a second. Mother has said everything she can think of."

"You told her then?"

"Of course I did—I wrote to her."

"You good fellow!"

"I don't know that it was all goodness," said he, a trifle hurriedly.

"Well, but Claude, just listen to me and don't look impatient," said Lottie, seriously—

"She won't listen to you—you don't seem to me to have made any way; you'll just break your heart while she doesn't care. You know she says she won't marry anyone; and then—she must marry money."

"Very likely," said the Viscount, doggedly.

"I wish you were a little more like other people, Claude, your mother's made you romantic—she kept you too long at home. Nobody but you would want to throw yourself away on a girl who makes herself unhappy because of her odious temper."

Certainly, the Viscount was not like other people, for he suddenly left his heroics and began to laugh.

"What now!" said Lottie, indignantly.

"You laugh at nothing!"

"No, I don't, my dear—I laugh at you, and I really can't help it. One would think you hadn't an idea of love at all."

"I don't see why. I don't profess to your headlong way of doing things—I'm reasonable."

"Oh yes, very—awfully reasonable to lecture a fellow who's half wild—and—and—no, Lottie, I don't think you are headlong, as you call it," he persisted in laughing still.

"When you've spoiled your life," said she, pointing, "you'd wish you'd been reasonable too. You can't break her spirit like the Duke could—you're not brute enough. You're a Quixote all over. I knew all along—I told you I did—it wasn't the least use your fencing with me. I'm very sorry indeed. She'd be much happier with the Duke."

"Why?"

"Because you'll spoil her, make her a martyr till she'll make you one. He'll be more severe."

"Will he!" said D'Eyncourt, through his teeth. "I'd smash the life out of him if he tried it. But he won't have the chance."

"Claude, don't do anything rash."

"My dear girl, what do you think I mean?"

"I don't know," said Lottie. "But if you'd seen how you looked! I wish"—vehemently—"you'd never met that girl! Men are such idiots! Talk about women! Men are eaten up with sentimentality. They never do see through a girl if only she has big eyes! I'm just glad Downham is coming."

She went off like a whirlwind, but her feelings were mollified by the early appearance of the Duke, who was nearer forty than thirty, and looked the sort of man who would easily cow a timid woman.

He came in the dog-cart that had been sent to meet him, and was received by the Earl on the steps. But where was the hostess?

"She's been called away suddenly," said the Earl, glibly; but it was evident to the little party assembled in the drawing room before dinner that a scene had taken place between father and daughter.

"She was in the house all the time, I know for a fact," whispered Lottie to D'Eyncourt.

"Quite right, too," from him, defiantly.

My lady received the Duke chillingly. She only bowed, and after the briefest inquiries turned to other guests. Perhaps she had heard that club story, and meant to show the visitor what metal she was made of.

The Viscount fought her battle in his own way—exasperatingly polite to the Duke but constantly confusing the blunter brain by a sense of something behind all this elaborateness.

Alix often made a shield of the Viscount to protect her from the Duke's presence, but was no kinder to the shield than before. He didn't much care. Her turning to him had so little of coquetry, was so instinctive that it soiced him for any amount of snubs.

In this state of things, when the atmosphere became charged with inflammable material, the night arrived when the whole party was to go to a ball some miles off.

Just before she went to dress Lottie came running excitedly to D'Eyncourt to tell him that there had been a frightful row. Something about the Duke, and Alix wasn't going, and it was time for him to dress.

"Is it?" said the Viscount, languidly. "Very well."

But he did not go to dress. He sent his man to the Earl at the last moment with the excuse that he was not well enough for the ball, and when the last carriage had gone he went to the big library and paced up and down there.

What had happened? What should he do? How flid out? Had there been an irreparable breach between Alix and her father? He turned suddenly. Was that Alix gliding rapidly past the open windows towards the shrubberies? She had vanished among the trees before he had time to spring to the window and down the terrace steps after her. Heavens! was she running from home?

CHAPTER V.

"I DON'T HATE YOU."

BUT Alix had no such intention just then. It was because she had no intentions of any sort and could not beat any into her brain that she had come out into the fresh night air. She wasn't stifled here, and she sat down on a bench under some trees, or rather crouched, leaning her head against the arm. Thought then became a little clearer.

Lottie had been right about what she had denominated "a row." Lord Riverdale had taken his daughter to task about her treatment of the Duke, who had already mentioned his wishes to the Earl.

No doubt he would speak to Alix that night, and my lord in high-handed fashion desired my lady to consider the Duke's proposal favourably.

Naturally Alix's temper had not been proof

against this settling of her fate. She had vowed she would not go to the ball—her guests might think and say what they would—and she had rushed to her room and torn in pieces the lovely dress spread ready for her to wear, and locked herself in till the carriages had all gone.

So now she could contemplate the choice her father had given her—to obey or leave his house. As she had no money, and could not and would not live on her relations—friends poor Alix had none—this meant submission or beggary, and the contemplation of this fact only opened fresh vistas of misery to her till inaction and silence became unbearable; and she sat up, exclaiming passionately—

"I never will submit, come what may. Oh, I would marry the vilest beggar if but to show that I cannot be cowed like a slave!"

"Will you marry me, Lady Alix?" said a man's voice.

Alix sprang up, faced round, and stared blankly at Viscount D'Eyncourt.

"I'm very much of a beggar," said that audacious young peer, "if that gives me any greater claim. You told me once you hated me, but if you only want to escape your father, that won't matter. I don't hate you."

Alix was so absolutely breathless at this address, which would have been impudent but for a curious mixture of drollery and softness, that she could not give vent by a word to her mingled anger and shrinking fear. She retreated as he made a step towards her.

"Don't come any nearer," she gasped at last. "How dared you follow me! How dare you insult me and talk of a claim given by a few mad words you were never meant to hear!"

"I will drop that word then, and as you are helpless, here I am willing to help you. You can't be more unhappy with me than you are here."

"Are you mad, Lord D'Eyncourt?" demanded Alix. She really thought he was. "You have the insolence to tell me you pity me! You think I will accept your extraordinary offer to save myself from a hateful marriage!"

"Will you?" said the imperturbable Viscount.

"No, a thousand times!"

She sat down again resolutely as much to say—"I stay here, you go. I am mistress of the situation."

The Viscount didn't seem to see it in that light, for he sat down too.

"I don't think you are fair, you know," he said. "Do you really hate me, Alix?"

She sat speechless—not entirely from anger. Her heart beat suffocatingly.

"Because," said he, "I don't think you do. I've not much worth your acceptance, except my heart, and that's of worth according as you value it. I've a title; of course you don't care for that; I've lands, not very productive; I've jolly little money, and—and not very good health."

A smothered sound from Alix that sounded like a long-drawn "oh!" and she had turned right from him.

"So you see," went on the Viscount, glancing at her covertly, "I am heavily handicapped, and if you'd been happy and cared for I should never have said this to you."

Down went Alix's head on the arm of the bench; from her came the suppressed exclamation—

"How should anyone care for me!"

"Well, I do."

"You only pity me."

The little hand on her lap clenched itself tightly—a movement not unobserved by the Viscount.

"No," he said, reflectively. "I believe I fell in love with you when we met up in town. I believe I was dreaming of you when I made that false step on the Matterhorn; so, as my helpless arm is partly your fault, don't you think you might do something to make up to me for what I lose?"

"I couldn't—I can't make anyone happy!"

"I'm a wicked wretch, and I wish I was dead!"

In answer to which outburst the Viscount possessed himself of that hand in her lap—a sort of flank movement which the enemy had not foreseen. Had her hand ever lain in so tender a clasp as this?

"You mustn't care for me," she whispered, helplessly. "I should break your heart. I'd better be wretched than wrong you."

"Then you do care for me after all?"

As there was no answer to this half assertion the attacking party proceeded to active measures. Proud Alix virtually surrendered when she made but the faintest resistance to his lifting her from her hard pillow and drawing her head to his shoulder.

"Why did you make it so hard for me to win, darling?" he said, while Alix lay still. "You knew you would have to give in."

"I wish I hadn't. If it was anyone but you!" she sighed. "If only you hadn't heard me!"

"That's pleasant to hear. Is that because you hate me?"

"Oh, don't remind me of that! I wish I had never said it!"

"Then it must be because you love me. You may as well confess it because I was pretty sure you did. What made you care for me?"

Alix laid her hand on the sliken sling his right arm rested in, but as she did not lift her head she did not see the look in the eyes that followed her movement.

"So," he said, "you were true woman after all."

"Oh, no, I was not. How unkind I was to you always, even that day when you saved me."

"But, my Alix, don't you see what all that meant? It hurt me very little because that was what made me so confident. You thought a great deal more of me than of anyone else. You fancied you would do me a great wrong and so you tried to be as unlovely as you could."

"It is a wrong," said Alix, lifting her head. "I know I've a vile temper. My wretchedness is half my own doing, and I shall only do the same over again, and your mother—"

The voice died away in a sob. She caught her breath to check it. The Viscount said nothing; he was more fond of doing than talking; he drew her quite close to him; and when, in spite of her protest, she hid her face on his breast, he kept pressing his lips to the soft tangled hair. The girl whispered—

"Don't love me—don't! I should kill myself if I made you unhappy!"

Then said the Viscount softly—

"You know, sweetheart, you are talking a lot of nonsense. You don't understand what love can do. Suppose I took you at your word and put you away from me."

He felt the quiver that went through her, but he was magnanimous enough not to triumph; he went on—

"You never had love and never gave it. I am not a bit afraid. Mother—well she always sees with my eyes, and she will love you very soon."

It's not easy for a girl in Alix's position to be self-sacrificing; it was such a luxury to be sympathised with and consoled and made much of, to feel that she was of value to someone, to have all her indefinite longings for goodness find a purpose and a help; to sink herself and her will to somebody else's. She did not answer D'Eyncourt; she lay quietly, looking at the sunniest vision she had ever seen. Presently he whispered—

"You are happier now?" and the girl sat up and pushed back her hair and looked at him smiling.

"What made you so unhappy to-night?" he asked, after a pause sufficiently full of brightness for both. "Lottie told me there had been a quarrel, and so I sent an excuse to your father, and when I saw you passing the library window I followed you. What was it all about?"

"The Duke," said Alix, hesitating.

"Well, dear?"

"Father spoke to me about him. He said I was to go to the ball, and he expected me to accept Downham. I said I wouldn't go at all. I was furious. Then he said if I did not give way I must leave the house!"

"What!" exclaimed D'Eyncourt, "he said that! My poor child! no wonder you were broken-hearted. Well, you shall take him at his word. You shall come away with me to-morrow early, to my mother."

"Oh, no!" said Alix, going scarlet.

"Oh, yes, sweetheart. Mother has left Scotland. I heard from her yesterday. She will be in town for a day or two, for all the days of her life if I ask it. I can manage it all easily. I am not going to ask your father for you, it would be a useless formality. Nor am I going to worry you just yet. I want you to have some rest first. So you will give way to me?"

"I wonder why I can't resist you," said the girl. "Is it because you are so gentle?"

"Because you love me," said the Viscount, and it was his turn to be not sure of his voice.

"I will try to be good," said Alix, earnestly. "Indeed I will. I will be hand and foot to you!"

"My own Alix!" and then they said a great deal to each other under those trees. If the trees could but have spoken!

Long before the party returned from the ball, Alix had dismissed her maid, locked herself in her room, and put together such things as she valued, to be taken early in the morning by D'Eyncourt's man and carried to the station.

It was, perhaps, a slightly buccaneer proceeding, this of the Viscount's. He was quite conscious, too, that it might be looked on as a breach of hospitality; but then, he argued plausibly, the Earl had invited him just to help fill the house; and, secondly, he wanted to get rid of his daughter to one man, so it couldn't matter to him if another man took her instead. Not that he argued at all when he and Alix were once outside the house.

He had left a note for the Earl and another for Lottie, to be delivered by the valet before he followed his master to town, and he had telegraphed to his mother, so he had only to think of Alix, who, on her side, was exceedingly subdued and very pale.

She needed all her pride when they reached Hill-street to hold herself not as unhappy Alix running away from home, but as Lady Alix Riverdale, coming to stay with Lady D'Eyncourt for a short time.

Whatever that charming Viscountess had felt on reading her son's telegram, she received Alix as warmly as even he could wish. Perhaps she had expected nothing less than such an ending, and had already written to put off her intended visit, for she had only been passing through town.

"That's too bad, mother," said the Viscount, remorsefully, when they were alone. "Well, dear, what else was to be done, since you had made up your mind?"

"Which making up you don't like, mother," throwing himself on the rug at her feet.

"I think it's a great risk; but, of course, it is too late now. Tell me about your visit. Ah! Claude, was not Alix after all the attraction, and not the shooting? What a hypocrite you are, with those frank blue eyes of yours. Poor Alix! I don't think you have been altogether fair to her. By-the-bye, how very nervous she was when she came in. She didn't seem able to speak, and I am sure there were tears in her eyes."

"I think she's afraid of you," said the Viscount, diplomatically.

"Afraid of me! I am sure I don't wish in the least to add to her burden, poor dear child!" exclaimed Lady D'Eyncourt. "It is a most awkward position for her naturally."

And when Alix came down to luncheon the Viscountess was so sweet and gracious that that wicked Viscount smiled to himself. You

see, he was not at all above taking advantage of his mother's kind-heartedness.

CHAPTER VI.

HIS TRIUMPH.

NEVER did marriage make such a stir and to do as that projected. First it was Harry Hazeldene.

"You'll repent it, D'Eyncourt. She's like sugar plums now, but after the first month—"

"She'll be strawberry and cream," said the Viscount, who still had his arm in a sling.

"It's a frightful pity," said poor Harry, carrying his grief to Lady D'Eyncourt. "The fellow is quite unmanageable."

"It's no use saying a word," said that lady, resignedly; "at the same time I think we have all a little misjudged Alix."

Then it was Lottie, who came in with a rush.

"Claude, what have you done?" she burst out.

"Nothing at all. It's very odd everyone is crying out to me, but it's only what my ancestors were always doing."

"I'm not talking of marching off with Alix in that cool way, it's the marrying her."

"Well, it is I that have to marry her, not you. How is the Earl?"

"Simply mad. He's coming up to town. Jack and I left, the place was unbearable. Downham, too, has gone in a huff. H'm, how's your arm, D'Eyncourt?"

"Nearly well, thanks," said the Viscount, with just the right smile.

"Going to be married in that sling?" said Lottie.

"Most likely, if I'm not made to wait. Seems to me the sooner I'm married the sooner all the croakers will be stopped. It will be Alix next."

But it was not. It was the Earl. The butler serenely informed that irate peer that my lord hadn't come yet; he had rooms at the hotel, and could be sent for.

"I asked for my daughter!" said the Earl, angrily.

"My lord gave strict orders," answered the butler, respectfully, "that should your lordship call he would see you himself."

Finally, in spite of remonstrances, the Earl was shown into D'Eyncourt's private room, and a servant despatched for the young Viscount, who presently came in, looking so handsome and serene that he was enough to drive anyone out of temper—for all the world as if he had done nothing out of the way.

The Earl opened fire at once, and it was pretty hot fire. He demanded an explanation, he wanted to see his daughter, he insisted on her returning to him.

He flew into the family temper in fact. The Viscount, on the contrary, was terribly polite. It was like discharging a pop-gun against earthworks.

The Earl became exhausted at last, and resorted to disagreeable prophecies.

"You'll be miserable," said he, "and you'll deserve it. What Alix has been as a daughter she'll be as a wife."

"I think not," smilingly from the Viscount.

"I say yes, Lord D'Eyncourt." ("Denced rage he must be in to tip me a 'lord,'" thought the irreverent young man.) "Alix will be master in a month. She wants a tight hand, not your easy-going way."

"Do you know, I think that's where you make a mistake? It doesn't seem to me that the tight hand did very well. She wants love and deference where she has a right to it; she'll give obedience fast enough then where it's due. At any rate I'll try my plan, and you can tell me at the end of a year if it has answered. As to money," said the Viscount, who was always exclusively outspoken on these matters, "I can't make what are called

handsome settlements, but I'll do the best I can, and I've no debts," which was a very neat thrust, for everyone knew that the Duke of Downham owed tolerable sums.

Finally, the Earl went off in a towering rage, and D'Eyncourt went to find Alix and tell his story to her.

She was very depressed by it.

"Perhaps it would be better," she said.

"What would be better?" D'Eyncourt asked; but could get no coherent answer.

"You don't know? that's not satisfactory," he said, and Alix only turned her head away dejectedly.

"You and your father are making it very uncomfortable for me," said the Viscount, in his droll way. "I think there'd better be an end to it, don't you?"

"I—I think you'd better release me," said the girl, turning still further away. Two hands in her lap were trembling.

"Certainly, if you wish it," said the Viscount, equably.

He stood looking down on the trembling hands not quite so equably, and when the girl suddenly threw one arm over the back of her chair and bent her face down on it, that was of course going too far.

He was on his knee beside her at once, comforting in his winning way, half odd, half tender, till the girl first smiled and then laughed out.

"That's right," he said, brightly, "What's the arrangement to be then? We had better settle it at once. Shall I take this ring off?" laying his hand on the diamond circlet he had given her the very day of their arrival.

"It's one of two things—either this is my property or you are!"

"Claude, don't laugh at me!"

"That's an irrelevant answer. If you talk nonsense, naturally I laugh at you. Well, if you won't let me take it off,—for she had put her hand over his—will you let me add another to it?"

Alix said "Yes" under her breath, and was as happy as he was, till the mother's voice said close to them,—

"Well children!"

Then my lord started up, not a whit abashed, and threw his arm round the present Viscountess in exchange for the future one.

"Mother dear, do you mind being a dowager? Alix and I have just settled it."

"So I thought. No. I don't know that I do mind," said Lady D'Eyncourt, laughing—

"If you'll tell me when."

"Oh, a week—no? that won't do? I forgot dresses—trousseau—whatever it is—well a fortnight. That's quite long enough for Alix to make herself miserable."

"And what does Alix say?" said Lady D'Eyncourt, putting her son aside. "You mustn't let him have things just his own way, my dear."

But when Alix felt the kind arms enfold her, she hadn't a word to say, and so the question went by default, and a fortnight later the marriage came off.

It was a pretty wedding. The ladies said how handsome the Viscount was, and how interesting, poor fellow, with his arm still in a sling; and what a lovely dress the bride had, and were altogether delighted.

The breakfast and good-byes were got through much as usual, and by one o'clock the Viscount and the new Viscountess, found themselves in the train en route to the family place, where they were going to put each other to the severe test called a honeymoon.

"Alix!" said the Viscount, suddenly, they were nearing their station, and there had been a silence—people always get silent at the end of a long railway journey. "You look so pretty and happy I think I'll take courage and tell you something, only you'll have to forgive me."

Alix turned her large eyes to his tranquilly.

"What have I got to forgive?"

"That night at Riverdale—" all lovers will understand no further identification was

necessary—"I didn't speak quite the truth when I enumerated all my disadvantages, but as all is fair in love and war—"

"Didn't speak the truth!" repeated Alix, a little startled.

"I had every disadvantage but one—"

"Which was that?" she said, still more uneasily.

"The ill health."

It was wicked of him to enjoy the half-puzzled, half-glad look.

"Do you mean that the doctors," she began; "do they say you will quite recover?"

"I haven't been near the doctors for many a year, Alix!"

"I don't understand you."

"Yes, you do! Think a little, dearest. I told you I loved you from the beginning, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"And you snubbed everybody, and me most of all—I suppose because you saw I meant it. So, as I intended to have you, I resorted to this ruse—which I am now going to get rid of."

Alix stopped him pulling off the sling. She was pale, there were tears in her eyes.

"There was no accident—you were never ill?" she said, "you feigned it all because I was so hard-hearted and foolish—"

"No, no, love."

"Yes, I was. Oh, Claude, I don't know whether I am glad or sorry—glad that you are really well and strong, or sorry that I shall not need to do anything for you, and that I was so horrid! You have broken up all my plans."

Nevertheless she was smiling through her tears as she unfastened the sling, and her fingers bungled, being unsteady. D'Eyncourt's first movement with that freed right arm was to put it round her, and hold her close.

"You have left something out," he said, "There is one other thought you have not told me."

"I thought your need would make me gentle and patient—all you would wish."

"Love will do that, my sweetheart, so that if some day I need such care it will be ready. So no more tears—to-day of all days. I am forgiven then?"

"I don't know—you are not very penitent, I think. I shall keep this bit of silk as a souvenir," said Alix, with a look as bright as his. "Let me go—we are slackening."

"Never mind the guard," said the Viscount, laughing, "he knows when to be blind. Will you forgive me if I promise to take you to Switzerland next summer?"

"Yes, indeed!" said Alix, joyously. "Dear Claude!"

"Abbotsmead!" shouted the guard, so close that they could actually hear what he said, and it was doubtful whether he had not heard that affectionate address.

"You bad boy," wrote Lottie Males, when she sent congratulations. "I am not altogether surprised—not that you've gone and done it, but the other affair—the accident. I had a sort of a something like a suspicion, but you kept it up so well, I was not piqued."

As you're barely out of the honeymoon I suppose there are no breezes. I should like to see this time next year. By-the-by, are you too busy spooning to read the papers, or have you seen that Downham has married in Paris that plain Miss Underwood? Take my word for it she'll be the grey mare."

The Viscount laughed but he remembered one line in the letter, and when in a golden September, a small shooting party assembled at Abbotsmead Hall, Jack and Lottie were among it.

The days passed in a pleasant round—the men went out shooting, the ladies drove over for luncheon; there was visiting among the neighbours, music, carpet dances, and always a bright, cheerful atmosphere.

"What have you done with her, D'Eyncourt?" said Lottie. "I never enjoyed a

visit so in my life. Alix isn't like the same person. What's become of her temper?"

"I don't know," answered the Viscount. "She may show it sometimes to the servants, but then they are aggravating."

"Do you mean to say she and your mother have always got on as they do now?"

"I never saw anything else. Alix adores the mater as much as I do. It was her own wish for us to be all together."

"What have you done, then? Are you a magician?"

"No," said he, softly, "I am not—Love is."

Then he walked away rather quickly, and passed from the terrace through the window of Alix's boudoir and rather astonished that young person, who was reading on a couch, by throwing himself down beside her and taking the book from her hands. She looked up smiling.

"Well, what do you want?" she asked. "Is tea up? Am I to come?"

"No, you're to stay here with me."

"That's when I'm happiest," said the girl, nestling within the arm he put round her. "This is the quiet time, and I do love it."

"And to-morrow," said the Viscount, "is our wedding-day. Jove! it doesn't seem a year ago. Happy times go quickly."

"Claude," said the girl, bending her head down and twisting her wedding-ring round and round, "now we are quite alone, and to-morrow we shall have been married a whole year, if I ask you a question will you answer truly?"

"Yes, truly—whatever it is."

"Then if father asked you whether his plan or yours was the best—you remember you told him in Hill-street—what should you say?"

"Why, that his plan was nowhere," said the Viscount, promptly, "and mine perfect."

"But, Claude, you haven't forgotten that day I was so angry with you? I wanted to disobey you, and you only looked pained and grieved, and told me you'd speak about it when I was calmer. And you were kind to me, but a little distant, still I couldn't bear it and begged you to forgive me. Don't you remember?"

"Yes, sweetheart; but that was the first and last time. I was right from the beginning. Do you think," said the Viscount, lifting the downcast face and pressing it against him tenderly, "you would have come to me so soon as you did if it wasn't that you could not bear to hurt me or bring anything between us?"

"That's what mother said. But it's hard sometimes to be always trying."

"So it is, darling. But then I suppose everyone has to fight against something. We can't all be like the mater. And so long as you and I fight hand in hand that's all I shall hope for."

And here he stopped abruptly, for he had, as we have seen, more of the mater in him than he knew. And Alix said,—

"Dear Claude!" again, still more earnestly than she had done on their wedding day, and they went together to the drawing-room.

So the Viscount had triumphed all along the line, and the croakers croaked no longer. Nobody now said, "But—that temper of hers;" they changed the formula and asked each other, "But what has become of that temper of hers?"

[THE END]

FROST has a variety of effects upon different products. Under the same influence eggs will burst, apples will contract, and potatoes will turn black.

THE Parisians have a new insurance scheme. Riders in cabs can, by placing a penny in the slot of a little machine in the cab, obtain a certificate of insurance. Of course, the insurance only holds good whilst the assured is in the cab.

RETRIBUTION.

—O—

JAMES BRAY trembled visibly as he entered the bank in which he had once been a trusted employé. He knew, of course, that twelve fellow-citizens, sworn to well and truly try his case, had acquitted him; but some of his old associates might still suspect him, people not always agreeing with verdicts. They all saw that he had aged in the three months since he had gone away in custody of the police. A charge of robbery and twelve weeks' imprisonment would age any man, especially one whose family needs every cent of his small salary. Some of the clerks came to him with honest congratulations; others stood aloof, too busy perhaps; particularly one young man, Charles Price, who had been promoted to his place.

The messenger went into the cashier's private office to announce the waiting of the former employé, and returning, bade him go in. He timidly drew aside the heavy portieres and entered the little room, which was luxurious with tapestry Brussels, high-carved wainscot, stained-glass windows, walls and ceiling of elaborate papering—everything speckless to the beaten brass cuspidors. A large screen of clear plate-glass kept the heat of the old-fashioned wood fire from Mr. Francis Clare, the cashier, a stern man of fifty, who sat writing at a fine walnut desk. "Sit down, Bray, until I finish these signatures," said the cashier, busily, and the visitor sank weakly into a capacious chair.

"Bray," he began at length, after he had rung an electric-bell and sent out a bundle of papers by the messenger who answered it, "I congratulate you on the verdict."

"Thank you, sir."

"Of course," he continued, tapping his thumb nail with the point of an ivory paper-knife, "you cannot censure the bank for its action. Appearances were against you, you know."

Bray straightened himself, and a little spirit showed in his jaded figure as he replied,—

"You might have been less hasty. You might have given me more chance to clear myself."

"Why, my dear sir, you know as well as I do that a bank cannot be too strict regarding the honesty of its employees. We have thousands of pounds of other people's money here. It must be watched with the most exacting vigilance. Before its vast interests an individual must be brushed aside as a worm. In this case you were an individual, and you feel as if you have been treated as a worm. But you must remember that the stolen package of bills was on your desk just before you went to your luncheon. After you were gone they were missed."

The visitor's face flashed, and he nervously pressed his shallow hands together until the finger-nails grew red, and asked, earnestly,—

"Why, sir, you don't still think I took that money, do you?"

The cashier turned around on his pivoted chair, still tapping his nail, and looked through the glass screen into the waving flames. He slowly answered,—

"I am compelled to say, Bray, that appearances are still against you. That money has never been recovered."

"In spite of the verdict, sir?"

"Yes, in spite of the verdict. Frankly, there are still some people obstinate enough to think you took that money; and unfortunately for you, they are bank officers."

"They are unjust," said the accused man, with a low chord of despair in his tone.

"Probably. But, as I said, you cannot censure the bank. True, we turned you over to the law; for, as I have remarked, you were the individual, the worm to be brushed aside. But you must not forget that we paid

your counsel, and he cleared you. Could you expect more?"

"Yes, I think so."

"What?" the cashier asked, quickly, turning rapidly around, now that he had led the man to the chief point.

Bray rose as if for courage, and replied, in quivering voice,—

"Reinstatement!"

"I'm truly surprised at your mentioning that after what I have said—that some people still believe you stole that money. We can't, we dare not, employ a suspected man in the bank. Besides, your place has been filled by a younger, sprightlier man, of high social position—I might say, a better man for our purposes in every way. No, Bray, it can't be."

The "worm" was turning. Pallor drifted across his face, as he stepped to the desk, and said,—

"And my family and I are to starve because I am suspected, and that after having been acquitted by a jury. I couldn't have believed such injustice could be, sir."

"Oh, you'll hardly starve," said the cashier, with airy thought of his own secure elevation. "You're able-bodied, and fit at least for manual labour. I'll frankly confess that it will be difficult for you to secure a position of trust in the city. Our refusal to reinstate you will be hard upon you, but you must accept it as a harsh ruling of fate. If I hear of any small place, I'll see what I can do for you. I promise you that."

He touched the electric button, and the answering messenger showed Bray out. Stunned, helpless, he dragged himself several doors away out of observation from the bank windows, and stopped in sheer despair. His long anxiety in imprisonment had left him too weak to resist. Misfortunes seem to delight in striking when we are least able to strike back.

Days passed in vain effort to secure employment. Why had he not been reinstated? It was always the adverse ultimatum. Finally, a note came from Clare offering legal copying, in the same manner a bone is thrown to a dog. But the dog takes the bone and Bray took the copying. He could make very little, and he and his family were slowly starving. A stronger man might have become criminally desperate; Bray sank into the sullen, timid fury that often seeks suicidal relief.

One morning the papers gave glowing accounts of the marriage of Charles Price, his successor, to Dora, the beautiful daughter of the cashier. It was a union in high life, and the papers yielded columns to it, naming guests and describing dresses—the prices of which would each have been a fortune to the discarded employé. This wedding goaded him. The worm had been brushed aside; he now felt trodden. He saw Clare's deliberate sacrifice of himself, to advance his son-in-law. A silent hatred, terrible in tendency, gnawed him; thirst for vengeance burned in his timid heart.

One evening a hesitating knock fell upon the door of the poor lodging, whither misfortune had driven Bray and his family. He opened it himself, and was amazed to see Mrs. Price, Clare's daughter. She was much distressed, and asked nervously for a private interview. Mrs. Bray withdrew, and the young bride tremblingly began.

"Mr. Bray, I have learned that you are hunting for the man who stole the money from your desk at the bank."

He had made a few feeble moves in that direction, and, his gaunt face hardening at recollection of his failure, he replied affirmatively.

"And you have discovered that it was my—"

She stopped, stared at him, for a light had flashed upon him, driving the flush caused by the visit into pallor, while his eyes, larger now in the thinness of his face, seemed to glare cruelly. He remembered now that Charles Price had frequently done his work

while he was out at lunch, and wondered that he had not thought of it before. A cold tremor waved over him, at the thought of the power this discovery would place in his hands. He looked down at the weeping young woman, and replied, hoarsely,—

"Yes, I have discovered it."

"And you were about to make information against him?"

"Yes; just about to put him where I once was," he replied, ferociously.

"Oh, he is torn with remorse," she cried, wringing her hands behind her muff. "He confessed it to me. Oh, what a blow to a young wife! Think, Mr. Bray, think what a disgrace to us. Think where it will drag my husband and father and me? Oh, Heaven, it would be awful! I came to offer you any sum for your silence. Make it enough to enable you to go away where you can begin life over again."

He drew himself up proudly, but his eyes were unsteady and his nostrils dilating, while his hands, clenching, one above the other, the front of his coat, trembled pitably. In a tone, which he tried to force into sternness and steadiness, he answered,—

"And still have the disgrace? No, I cannot do it. I am entitled to my good name. Nothing—nothing can pay me for that. Your father has taken it away from me; he must give it back. I have nothing to do with the disgrace that will fall upon your father and your husband and—no, not upon you. I would spare that if I could."

"I thought you had not forgotten, Mr. Bray, the kindness I showed you once."

Wavering appeared in his face, but an accidental glance around the cramped home, its bareness, its discomfort caught his sternness in its flight, and he said,—

"Is it right, Mrs. Price, is it right for you to make a point of my gratitude now? I dare not let it influence me! Dare I allow this crime to rest upon me and let my children grow up in its shadow? What would your money be to me, when we would have to go far away among strangers, and have the story follow me there? No, no; I would spare you if I could, but my manhood, my wife, my children demand that this cloud should be swept away. And your father must do it, let consequences be what they may. He called me a worm to be brushed aside. The worm has turned, Mrs. Price!"

"Name any amount, and I will double it!" cried the distressed young wife.

"I will not."

"But think, Mr. Bray, that what I offer will be far more than you could save in years from your salary at the bank."

"And lose something that is worth double, twice any amount you could give. I refuse. I will go to-morrow to your father, and he must lift the heel that he has set upon me."

He was very haggard next morning, when the messenger showed him again into the private office. Mr. Clare again sat writing at his table, and again kept him waiting, but one could easily have seen that the visitor was irritating him. At length, finishing a signature with unnecessary scratch—if the pen, he said, sharply,—

"Bray, I am very busy. To save time, I'll tell you at once that there are no vacancies."

A little red spot flashed upon each of Bray's cheeks, and his eyes flashed the pent fire, as he arose, replying,—

"There will be one soon."

"Oh, there will!" sincerely. "I beg your pardon, I didn't know it. Perhaps you mean mine?"

"My old place will be vacant to-day."

The cashier swung angrily around on his pivoted chair, but catching himself, as if suddenly struck at the man's seriousness, leaned forward, placed one hand over the other upon the table and with calm scorn, said,—

"Your name should be Daniel, Bray. You give your prophecy very little time for fulfilment."

Bray walked forward and stopped at the

table-side opposite Mr. Clare, placing his slouch hat thereon, with his left hand nervously crumpling it. Stern purpose showed in his face, but he evaded the cashier's eyes, fixing his own upon the black figures upon the desk calendar. The "worm" was turning, but with a worm's weakness.

"You taunt me," he said, chokingly. "I know you are strong and powerful, but I warn you, sir, not to be too scornful. Do you love your daughter?"

"You are impudent. I'll have you thrown out of the door."

He reached for the electric button, but Bray's voice stopped him.

"You have married her to the man who stole that money."

Clare sprang up, his face swelling, and striding to the table end, with clenched fist, said,—

"I called you worm, and I only brushed you aside before. I shall now crush you."

"Send for Price," said Bray, quietly.

"Do you mean, you cur, to reiterate that Charles Price, my son-in-law, stole that package of bills? I shall make you rue the accusation."

"Send for him," Bray repeated, quietly, the crimson spots expanding.

"He shall be summoned, and he will kill you! Do you dare?"

Pallor suddenly invaded the crimson, but he repeated, tremulously,—

"Send for him."

The messenger answered the ring, with drew, and Price appeared. With that peculiar stern levity which often shoots up from inward seriousness, Clare motioned, flourishingly toward Bray, and said,—

"Ha! Price, our worm here has turned on us! He says that you —"

He stopped. One swift look into Price's face, and the cashier sank into his desk chair; for that face had blanched, leaving red spokes of excitement, and the watery eyes looked at nothing.

"You—you—" the cashier muttered. He could not proceed; could only gaze, fascinated, into Price's twitching face. He was trying to stand erect, but his chest was heaving, each breath seeming to leave it more inflated, until, as if it could hold no more, and guilty thoughts were crowding into unbearable pressure, with a deep sigh, he said, "Bray has spoken truly; I took the money."

Clare sprang up, livid, his fingers crooking and uncrooking. He reached for the young man's collar, but stopped, and upbraided him,—

"You scoundrel! You have deceived us! You will have to suffer!"

The fierce words seemed to fan Price's smouldering courage, and he said,—

"You know what I stole that money for."

"I know?"

"If you don't, you should."

"I don't, and I shouldn't."

"Then listen, for you must know: By your will you forced your daughter to marry me against her choice. I was of high family; you hoped for some advantage. Don't deny it, you did. I loved Dora; I love her yet. I took that money to bear the expenses of our elegant wedding that you insisted upon. Your wish has been fulfilled, your daughter married high; she is a Price, and I—I am a thief. Yes, a thief. Now, what will you do? Turn me over to the law and disgrace your daughter and yourself?"

The cashier fell back into his chair and caught the arm-ends in a grasp that paled his knuckles.

Price remained as he had uttered the last word, not defiant, but as if awaiting a blow; while Bray still stood by the table, his hat crumpled tightly in his left hand, his right clenching the desk-edge. He had not moved since Price came in.

A silence dropped into the room; so deep, that the hum of the bank reached them, with coin clinking—even the scratching of the nearest pen.

Clare's face showed a conflict. The two watchers saw justice desperately fight its way to victory. It almost seemed as if the anger wrinkles uncurred into those of age. He looked a bowed, broken man, years older, as he turned towards Price, and in a softer, but still stern voice, said,—

"Price, you have disgraced me and my child. It would seem that I should shield you, for Bray, cannot prove your theft."

He slowly arose, and a little of the old tone he had used towards Bray rang in his voice, as he exclaimed,—

"But individuals and their relatives and their hearts sink before the interests of a great institution such as this. The directors are here. It is my duty to lay this matter before them. Both of you wait until I come back."

He looked at neither as he spoke, but vacantly, as if his whole attention was engaged in wringing these words from a reluctant heart; and he looked at neither as he turned, dignified, determined, and went out of a back door.

Price sank into the nearest chair, but Bray stood. The worm had turned, and was still. Silence, pierced by suspense, crept into the office. The brazen clock beat on sedately, with a seeming longer interval of waiting between ticks; the buzz of the bank, clinking, and the rattle of wheels in the street leaked in; and each moment Price sank lower into his chair, waves of suspense dashing their white foam on his face.

But the "worm" still stood, looking at the door through which had vanished the man against whom he had turned. His sallow, trouble-streaked face was a study—a deserted look there, as if something were retreating to his heart; an expression of looking backward over his suffering, and the dreadful consequences of guilt, or even suspicion of it.

There are degrees of satisfaction. Some demand the highest pleasure; others are content with little. The vengeance of some stops not on this side of murder—"If the trodden worm doth turn, hath it strength to justify avenge?"

Clare returned, wounded, but determined; the old dignity there, but tempered.

"Bray, the directors want you. You have suffered most; we will wait and hear on your decision."

The merest tremble of appeal was in the tone; the merest sign in the eyes and face. The mighty man, who had crushed him, was now appealing to him. Here was the triumph he had prayed for—the chance to mercilessly avenge. But the "worm" quivered, crumpled the hat still more, and walked weakly through the door, to meet the solemn body above.

And next day he stood making figures, as of old, in his book; the cashier, changed, less assertive, older, wrote wavering signatures in his luxurious room; and Charles Price, with his wife, was speeding away on a journey for his health.

A TRAVELLER in Central Australia has discovered that the surface of the country has been greatly changed by what may appear at first thought a ridiculous agency—the white ants. On plains and in thickets their nests are so numerous that it is difficult to drive among them. The clay with which the nests are built is, when cemented with resinous matter, as hard as brick, and when the nests fall to pieces they form clay flats, almost impervious to water, and not easily cut up by traffic. The work of these creatures can be studied in all stages, first in the thickets, where they are commencing work; then in the more open country, where they have crowded out the timber; next on the plains, where half the hills will be found deserted; and lastly on the clay flats, where they have almost entirely disappeared, and the scrub has begun to grow again. The nests are further remarkable for the large proportion of iron they contain.

FACETIE.

WHEN a tailor makes a misfit it must be sheer carelessness.

HISTORY repeats itself, but it isn't particular to stick to the same story.

"Your husband wears his hair very short." "Yes, the cowardly wretch!" replied Mrs. Turner.

MATHEMATICS is all right as long as both husband and wife like to read their old love letters to each other.

THERE is no particular harm in riding a hobby, if you do not take up the whole road with it.

MAN is a good deal like a fish. You know the fish would never get into very serious trouble if it kept its mouth shut.

"WHAT is pa swearing so energetically about?" "He is cross because his article on 'The Evils of Profanity' was crowded out."

"THERE is one man in the world that is invariably bound to rise." "What one is that?" "The man who sits on a tack."

A DISTINCTION.—Miss Pikestaff: "He tried to kiss me. How dared he?" Miss Passley (sympathetically): "How could he?"

PARSON VISION: "You say you are here as the result of sowing wild oats. What did you raise?" Prisoner: "Cheq. es."

THE REASON—"And why were you discharged from the last place?" "I'd served me time."

THE time comes when some men leave father and mother, and cleave unto their uncle.

IT is premature to tell any woman that she is an angel until it is seen how she can cook a steak and boil a potato.

THE man who "cannot sing the old songs" and won't try is the one we like to meet at an evening party.

SHE: "You will ask papa, will you not, or must I?" He: "Oh, I have seen him. Fact is, he made the suggestion that it was about time for me to propose."

MISS ELDERLY (who is ugly): "It is not so long ago that a man almost committed a crime to please me." Female friend: "What! Did he try to kiss you?"

A BOXY VIEW: "So, young man, you have gone and snatched yourself to my daughter, eh? What are your prospects, sir?" "Perfectly heavenly!"

"PAPA, why does the drum major of a band wear that big thing on his head?" "Because the natural size of his head is not equal to the occasion, my son."

SHE (on the river): "Oh, how delightful it would be to drift on like this for ever and ever." He (who has hired the boat): "Not at a shilling an hour."

JUDG: "You are accused of not supporting your wife." Prisoner: "But, your honour, you don't know my wife. She is insupportable."

POOR PIANO-PLAYER (apologetically): "Really, I don't give much time to my music." Musician (with a shudder of disgust): "Well, I should say not!"

PROFESSOR: "To what circumstance is Columbus indebted for his fame?" Johnnie: "To the circumstance that America had not yet been discovered."

LITTLE TOMMY: "Mamma, papa, has been drinking." Mother: "What makes you think so?" Tommy: "He said that you were an angel."

"COURTSHIP is a poem," said Maud's mother in gentle tones, and with a retrospective smile on her face. "So it is," replied the old man gruffly, "written in gas meter."

HE: "A penny for your thoughts." SHE: "You'd find them dear at the price." HE: "What were you thinking about?" SHE: "You."

It frequently happens that the prettiest maidens do not obtain husbands. It was thus in ancient days, for it is well known that the Three Graces remained old maids.

"BARBERS are too fond of conversation." "No, you wrong them. What they like is soliloquy. You'll find it you attempt to do any of the talking most barbers will drop lather in your mouth."

"YOUR mother, I understand, has been very ill, Thomas?" "Yessir." "Is she mending, Thomas?" "Mending? No, indeed! She said I could go without clothes before she would sew another darned stitch."

HE (referring to the music): "Don't you think I'm slow and a little too soft?" SHE (absently): "Yes. But then you have wealth and position, and that counts for something."

SHE: "You never hear of women cashiers embezzling or running off with their employers' money." HE: "Not often; but when it does happen, they take their employer too."

MRS. BROWN (to her pretty daughter in the elevator): "I will speak to the guard if that young man over there don't stop staring at me." Daughter (innocently): "I don't think he is staring at you, mamma."

DESDEMONA (bursting into tears): "It's too bad of him—he knows that I love him, and yet—and yet—" Emilia: "Yet what?" Desdemona: "He lets me flirt with any one I wish to, and doesn't say a word."

"You have spurned me!" he cried, bitterly; "I will go into the world. I will fight and win. My name shall be known and my riches envied." "Then," she interrupted, "try me again."

YOUNG Mr. Saintly says he "finds the work in his new parish very interesting." "I should think he would," said old Gruffham, "there are six unmarried girls to every man in the congregation."

WOLF: "What is the trouble between you and Miss Fipps?" Van Pelt: "I spoke to her without an introduction, and she told me I was no gentleman. I told her she was no judge." "What did she say to that?" "She said it did not take one to tell."

FRIEND: "Not as a stage of production." Author: "How else can I make any money out of it?" Friend: "Have a big edition of it published and sell it as a cure for insomnia. You can make a big thing out of it that way if it's rightly pushed."

A WIDOWER married a sister of his late wife, a few weeks after the death of the latter. An acquaintance who had just returned from a long journey sympathetically inquired whom he was in mourning for. "For my sister-in-law," was the hesitating reply.

An artist gave his latest painting to a porter to carry to the academy. "Be careful, be careful," said he, "the picture is scarcely dry." "Oh, never mind!" exclaimed the porter. "It's of no consequence at all; my clothes are old."

PAT: "Phwat's a phrenologist?" TIM: "Whoy, a man who can tell phwat kind of mon you be by the bumps on yer head." PAT: That's funny! Why I should be thought, begobs, he could better tell what kind of a wife mine is by the bumps on my head."

AGENT: "What the matter with your last place?" DOMESTIC: "Oi don't like th' Christmas present th' missus gave me. It's a silver clock." "That certainly is a nice present." "Yis, but, sure, ivery mornin' befor daylight it do go all to pieces; an, scares th' loif out av me."

"My wife has a dog which knows one hundred different tricks. Wouldn't you like to have him?" "Indeed I would. Is he for sale?" "No." "Won't she sell at any price?" "No." "Then why do you speak to me about him?" "I was in hopes maybe you would steal him."

An ill paid minister went to his deacon to solicit an increase of salary. "Salary!" said the deacon: "I thought you worked for soulst." "So I do," replied the poor man, "but I cannot eat souls, and if I could, it would take a good many of your size to make a dish."

"You ought to be married, sir," said the phrenologist to the victim on the stage. "Yes, sir, you ought to be married. You have no right, sir, to have lived a bachelor for so many years. Now, look at your clothes, sir! Who mended your coat, sir? Tell me that." "My third wife, sir."

YOUNG Mrs. Squizzle was remonstrating with her husband, a dissipated spendthrift, for his conduct. "Dear wife," said he, "I am like the prodigal son; I shall reform by and by." Mrs. Squizzle replied: "I will be like the prodigal son, too, for I will arise and go to my father."

SHE: "This is a pretty hour of the night for you to come home after promising me to be in at a quarter to twelve. You are the biggest liar in the city." HE (pointing to the clock): "Well, ain't three a quarter of twelve? It ain't my fault that you don't know arithmetic."

AN Arkansas editor replies to a correspondent.—"P.S.—We really think that you had better not visit us in order to receive an explanation of the reason why we have rejected your manuscript. Our staircase, we beg to inform you, has twenty-four steps, and we do not keep a bolster at the bottom."

A MILEMAN who resides in a London suburb met the local sweep one day, and thinking to have some fun at the latter's expense, asked him when he had a good wash last, to which the knight of the brush immediately replied. "If I used as much water in my business as you do in yours, I should have a bath every day."

"I WILL insert the item with pleasure," said the city editor, "as the gentleman is refers to a nephew of yours; but I think I would change it a little. You say, 'the public will be interested in knowing that Mr. Orville Ardup is about to embark in the lecture field.' The expression is not strictly accurate. The figure is a faulty one. Persons embark in vessels or something of that kind, you know. They don't embark in a field." "The figure is all right," said the old subscriber, reflecting a moment. "I expect to float him."

A THEATRICAL manager who had a limited purse, and consequently a limited company, occasionally compelled some of the actors to "double"—that is, play two or more parts in the same piece. "Lancaster," he said one morning, addressing a very servicable utility man, "you will have to enact three parts in *The Silent Fox* to-night—Henderson, Uncle Bill, and the Cuckoo." "Can't do it," replied Lancaster; "impossible—can't be done." "You can't do it? You won't do it? Why?" "Because it is impossible," returned the indignant actor. "No human being can play those three parts at the same time. In the first scene of the third act two of them have a fight, and the third fellow rushes in and separates them."

FUSSY MAN (hurrying into newspaper office): "I've lost my spectacles somewhere, and I want to advertise for them, but I can't see to write without them, you know." Advertising Clerk (likely to be business manager some day): "I will write the ad. for you, sir. Any marks on them?" Fussy Man: "Yes, yes. Gold rimmed, lenses, different foci, and letters L. Q. C. on inside. Insert it three times." Advertising Clerk: "Yes, sir. Five shillings, please." Fussy Man: "Here it is." Advertising Clerk: "Thanks. It gives me, sir, great pleasure, very great pleasure to inform you, sir, that your spectacles are on top of your head." Fussy Man: "My stars! So they are. Why didn't you say so before?" Advertising Clerk: "Business before pleasure, you know."

SOCIETY.

THE Emperor of China has begun the study of English arithmetic.

THERE are said to be twice as many eligible bachelors as marriageable ladies in the United States.

IN the middle ages, the bride was led to church by the bridegroom's men, the bridegroom by the bridesmaids.

THE manufacture of thimbles was first introduced into England from Holland in 1695 by a metal worker named John Sotling.

FRENCH women are taking to cycling with an enthusiasm that is second only to that shown for the exercise by Frenchmen. The craze is new, but it is already in full activity.

THE father of one of the largest property holders in London is buried in a glass case on top of one of the finest buildings in the City.

BACK combs are again fashionable. They are two or three inches in height now, and promise to attain the proportions of our grandmothers' time.

TO the French colourist all things are possible. A combination of turquoise blue and water green is one of the most recent French fancies in evening brocades.

A NEW freak is the collecting of odd cups and saucers, with, if possible, a tea plate to correspond with each. These odd sets are brought into requisition at afternoon teas, and the greater the variety the better.

WOMEN who have the white Paisley shawls of twenty or thirty years ago laid away among their treasures, should produce them now and make them over into the prettiest of opera cloaks. They are lined with shot silk or brocade of bright colours, and have double-berthed capes of border edged with its own fringes.

THE Queen is so favourably impressed with the picturesque turbans worn by her own Mussulman attendants that she has requested Lord Lansdowne to restore the old-fashioned Oriental head dress whenever practicable. In accordance with this intimation, the hideous caps of the Viceroy's bodyguard have been replaced by gorgeous turbans of red, dark blue and gold.

THE costly palace which the Empress of Austria has had constructed at Corfu to gratify her whim for a new home, is one of the most luxurious as well as one of the most curious buildings in Europe. It is a reproduction on an enlarged scale and with modern appliances of one of the palatial dwellings of Pompeii. The frescoes on the wall, illuminated by incandescent electric lamps half-hidden in the foliage of the friezes, represent scenes from the mythological legends relating to Achilles, and on the walls are inscribed proverbs and apothegms, some of them borrowed from Lord Lytton's works. The furniture is strictly Pompeian in design.

THE Parisian doggies have their "latest fashions" as well as their aristocratic mistresses—we speak, of course, of those tiny little canine pets who are put into overcoats in winter. A sort of little flannel shirt, white or blue, is *chic* for the morning; for the afternoon walk an overcoat in English cheviot, and a little mantle to cover the chest, with old silver fastenings. For driving, a blue, mouse-coloured, or chambray cloth coat, with a velvet collar, trimmed with medals, or a fur one. For drawing-room wear cashmere or velvet, embroidered with pearls, with coronet and arms of the owner on the collar.

A "FESTIVAL" of an unusual, probably unique, kind is to be held on what is known as St. David's Eve (Monday, February 20th) at St. Paul's Cathedral. The service, and presumably the sermon, will be wholly in Welsh. The Lord Mayor will attend in state, and the arrangements are in the capable hands of Sir John Poleson and a committee of Welshmen. There is to be a Welsh choir.

STATISTICS.

THE tusks of an ordinary elephant weigh about 120 lb.

THE value of the Vatican in money would exceed £30,000,000.

OVER a quarter of each generation die before attaining the age of 17.

SIXTEEN thousand women are now employed in the post offices of England, besides 8,877 in the permanent staff of the department.

THE people of Paris have consumed within the year 21,221 horses, 229 donkeys, and forty mules, the meat weighing, according to the returns, 4,615 tons. At the 180 shops and stalls where this kind of food is sold, the price has varied from 2d., a pound to 10s., the latter being the price of superior horse-steaks.

GEMS.

IT is easier to forgive enemies we have worsted than enemies who have worsted us.

HE who gives in time of need, though small the gift, has done as great good as if it had been as "broad as the earth and as rich as Heaven."

IT is always wise to avoid doing that which will cause you to be talked about unfavourably. However innocent you may be hundreds of people will believe you guilty.

IT is a great mistake to imagine that success without effort will ever make a man or woman happy. What we cease to strive for ceases to be success, and gradually becomes more and more worthless.

TRY to keep clear of prejudice, and be willing to alter any opinion you may hold when further light breaks upon your mind. He is clever beyond precedent, or weak beyond measure, who never sees reason to change his judgment of men and things.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

NUT CAKE.—Four eggs, well beaten; two cups of sugar, one cup of butter, one cup of cold water, three cups of flour, two teaspoonfuls of cream tartar, and one of soda. Two cups of chopped nut-meats, added the last thing.

GENOA CAKE.—Six ounces of flour, one ounce of almonds, four ounces of butter, three ounces of suet, four ounces of sugar, three eggs, two ounces of peel, half teaspoon baking powder, half teaspoon lemon essence, cream, butter, and sugar. Add eggs well beaten, then flour, fruit, and baking powder. Bake in moderate oven till ready.

SEA PIE.—One pound of scraps of meat or mutton, one carrot, turnip, one onion, three potatoes, salt and pepper; cut up the meat, (scraps of various kinds will do, and be more tasty), and put it in a pot. Cut up the carrot, turnip, and onion small, and put them in a pot, and cut the potatoes in quarters. Pour boiling water over them a short time before, drain, and put them in. Sprinkle over with salt and pepper enough to season, and cover all with as much cold water as cover the whole well. Put on the lid, and let it boil, then make this paste to put over it:—One teaspoonful of flour, two ounces of suet chopped, half teaspoon baking powder, and half teaspoon salt. Mix the whole to a dough with water, make into a sponge the size of the pot, put it on the top of all the other things, and put on the lid again, and cook slowly for one hour. If there are potatoes boiling separately you may leave out the potatoes in the pie. This pie may be made with liver instead of meat. It is very tasty and good.

MISCELLANEOUS.

PADDINGTON STATION of the Great Western Railway is 70 acres in extent.

SOUNDINGS to the depth of 26,700 feet have been made on the coast of Africa.

SPIDERS break off their webs and remove them before approaching rains.

IT is said that the use of gas in libraries causes the destruction of the leather bindings of the books.

THE French description of the English climate is that there are eight months of winter and four of bad weather.

CERYON has a spider which spins a yellow web, the threads of which are almost as large as buttonhole twist. Its webs are often from six to eight feet across.

THE largest word known belongs to the German language. Take out your best "unabridged" and look for Metamidomethylthymethylbenzylidiamidophenylcarbinol. And there are men who say this word every day and let their tongue run around it almost carelessly.

IN Russia natives who forget or lose their passports and can or will give no satisfactory account of themselves are called tramps or *brodyags*, and flogged and banished to the most distant parts of Siberia, in company with out-throats, incendiaries, and the most abandoned criminals.

IN Syria there is a certain religious sect the members of which are forbidden to drink from a vessel that has touched the lips of a stranger. In spite of this, they never refuse a drink of water to the thirsty traveller, although they must immediately destroy the cup which he has used.

AFTER a characteristically painstaking observation of the monkeys in the Zoo, Charles Darwin wrote: "If a young chimpanzee be tickled—and the acropits are particularly sensitive to tickling, as in the case of our children—a decided chuckling or laughing sound is uttered, though the laughter is sometimes noiseless."

A NOVEL method is, it is said, about to be adopted in Belgium to determine whether Sunday shall be a day of rest for letter-carriers. Sunday postage stamps are to be provided. All letters without such stamps posted on Saturday are to be delivered on Monday. After trying the experiment for a while, it is to be decided according to the relative number of letters with these postage stamps, whether the letter-writing public wants the postman to enjoy a Sunday rest. If they do, then postmen are to be freed from Sunday work.

OF the various decorations in the world, so the *Gotha Almanack* says, there still exist at the present time 178, inclusive of eleven which only belong to the fair sex. The most ancient decoration bestowed upon ladies is the Austrian Order of the Star and Cross, founded in 1668 by Eleanor, the widow of Emperor Ferdinand II. The Shah of Persia founded a decoration for ladies in 1873, and the Sultan of Turkey one in 1860—the Nishan Sherefah. Spain has the largest number of decorations (14), but Prussia beats her in the number of combinations and classes. The most ancient Order in the world is the English Order of St. Andrew, of the year 787; next comes that of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem (1048)—changed in 1118 to that of the Knights of Rhodes and Malta—followed by the ancient Spanish decorations of Alcantara (1156), Calatrava (1158), and the Portuguese Order of St. Benedict d'Aliz, founded by Alfonso II. in 1162. The number of extinct decorations is 31, nearly all of which (26) owe their becoming extinct to the political changes which have taken place both in Italy and Germany. Among these are the Military Order of Constantine, founded in 817, and the Order of San Carlo, for ladies, founded by the unfortunate Empress Charlotte of Mexico.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

A. O.—Staffordshire wills are proved at Litchfield.

BESIDE.—The 5th March, 1882, was on a Tuesday.

COURAGE.—The marriage is perfectly legal if properly performed and witnessed.

BOB.—H. Wainwright was executed December 21, 1875.

J. D.—Dr. G. H. Lamsan was executed at Wandsworth on April 23, 1882.

AN OLD FRIEND.—Consult a picture-dealer, or try a respectable auctioneer.

JEMMY.—The distance by ferry from Birkenhead to Liverpool is about one mile.

ABRAHAM.—The Crimean war cost more in money and human lives than the Egyptian campaign.

UNHAPPY.—Nothing but a divorce legalises a second marriage while the first husband is alive.

POOR DORA.—A stepmother has no legal claim on her husband's child by a first wife.

J. J.—All licensed houses are subject to the same restrictions as to opening.

MIRIAM.—The case is one in which only a lawyer can safely advise you.

LORD CLARE.—There is no Act of Parliament to compel the registration of partnerships.

CONSUMER.—Cannel coal costs from 11s. to 50s.; a ton gives from 9,000 to 11,000 cubic feet of gas.

FLAT.—Get a little rouge at a chemist's. Apply very moderately with a bit of cotton wadding.

FOREST.—Rabbits in a state of nature are the property of the owner of the land on which they are found.

NO MEANS.—A widow must pay her husband's debts to the extent of any money she inherits from him.

GRAMMAR.—It is pronounced both "my-ther" and "me-ther"; and either pronunciation is correct.

JIMMY'S DARLING.—The 2nd Battalion Royal Scots are at Malta, going to India.

JEANIE.—Liverpool to New York—distance 3,000 miles.

SCHOTENKY.—A gun-license is required for carrying and using an air-gun.

F. T.—A hawker's license is not required to sell fruit of any kind.

LUDDY.—The usual charge for a copy of the birth certificate is 5s. 6d.

HEIN.—A marriage or other settlement can be varied under an order of the chancery courts.

UNAWFORD.—The Lord Lieutenant of Ireland can on his own prerogative grant a reprieve to a condemned criminal.

HIS WIFE.—He may require to serve the three years either in China or India. It depends on the strength of the regiment.

INVENTOR.—Until a patent has been obtained the word "Patentees" may not be used, nor the Royal Arms.

GARY.—Any money due to the dead man can be claimed by the Guardians, to the extent of any sum paid by them on his behalf.

DISCOUNT.—If you have signed an agreement to buy the business, the vendor can take steps to compel you to fulfil the contract.

BYE-LAW.—An hotel-keeper can close at any time he thinks fit, without let or hindrance from magistrates or anyone.

USCLE BOBY.—Sergeant Ewart, who captured the standard at Waterloo, was not promoted, but was made famous in history and picture.

MY LADY.—Anyone using a crest on private stationery is liable to a penalty if he has not taken out a license for armorial bearings.

F. F.—Your case is by no means a new one; but your remedy is the county court. You cannot legally detain another person's property.

BIG BOY.—If you are tall and strong for your age you might obtain a berth as an ordinary seaman, though at a very small wage, owing to your inexperience.

TRANNET.—There is no law against playing a tin whistle in a public-house tap-room; but the landlord might object to your doing so.

ARTHUR.—I. From Newcastle, N.S.W., to Valparaiso comprises between two and three months. 2. Letter goes in six weeks to Valparaiso from Great Britain.

T. G. (3 spots).—It is quite illegal and punishable for an unregistered medical practitioner to take fees or prescribe for anyone. Such an one can be prosecuted.

GRABNIE.—You could only get a record of birth so far back as 1832 from the parish register of the church where the child was christened.

PUM.—The name is believed to be a perversion of thimble, as the thimble was formerly worn on the thumb.

PHILIP.—The holder of a cheque holds it against the person from whom he directly receives it. If you paid "A" too much you must recover the difference from him.

SOLDIER'S LASS.—The 16th Lancers are still at Lucknow, and as yet no intimation has been given of an intention to shift them to another station.

TAYING.—There are a number of lady clerks employed in the Post Office, appointments being obtained by examination. Apply to the Postmaster-General.

KEEPER.—No grace allowed in taking out dog-licenses. Probably nothing said if obtained at any time during first week of January; after that, look out.

INTERESTED.—It has been stated that no more double florins (4s.) will be issued; but there is no intention of stopping the issue of the ordinary florin piece.

CONSTANT READER.—The walnut grows abundantly in Cashmere, Nepal, and other parts of India, where the fruits are largely used.

SAM.—A purse of money always remains the property of its rightful owner, and the finder is liable to prosecution if he retains it knowing whose property it is.

QUEENIE.—Ida is a distinct name. Ida may also be distinct, but is often merely the contraction of Robina, Thomeina, Albertina, or other masculine name given to a female.

VESTA.—The Post Office Savings Bank is cumbersome in operation, the delay which takes place and the numerous forms to be observed in withdrawing deposits being inconvenient and vexatious.

MRS. BROWNE.—Boys of 14 to 16 years may be taken as buglers, drummers, etc., into the army. They may offer for a certain regiment, and will be taken for that if there are vacancies in it for boys.

SERVANT.—No such certificate can be claimed that a house has been disinfected; but the law requires the work to be done, and inquiry at the Sanitary Office, would, no doubt, secure the necessary information.

OUR CHOICE.

THESE JANE SOPHIE,
AND ANN MARIA
WITH OBADIAH,
AND JEDEKIAH,
IN OUR CHOIR.

And Jane Sophie, soprano, sings
So high you'd think her voice had wings
To soar above all earthly things
When she leads off on Sunday;
While Ann Maria's alto choirs
Rings out in such harmonious voices
That stammers in the church rejoice,
And wish she'd sing till Monday.

Then Obadiah's tenor high
Is unsurpassed beneath the sky;
Just hear him sing, "Sweet By-and-By,"
And you will sit and wonder;
While Jedekiah's bass profound
Goes down so low it jars the ground,
And wakes the echoes miles around,
Like distant rolling thunder.

Talk not to us of Patti's fame,
Of Niccolini's tenor tone,
Of Carr's alto—but a name—
Of Whitney's ponderous basso!
They sing no more like Jane Sophie,
And Ann Maria, Obadiah,
And Jedekiah in our choir,
Than cats sing like Tommaso!

MISS M.—The finder of a strayed dog is not bound to take it to a Dog's Home. He would, however, do well to give notice to the police, as inquiries are often made at the police office in such cases.

PUEZLED.—It is quite permissible to use either plural or singular verb with a noun of number or multitude; thus the public has and the public have are both equally correct. In the case you quote has is preferable.

BRISTOL EAST.—You would be legally bound by whatever order the Court made in your case. But we do not think that any respectable firm of solicitors would do other than give you a little leniency asked, especially as you have shown good will by your prior payment.

DORA.—White is not a colour; in other words, all the colours are so evenly balanced or blended in it that none shows above the other, and no colour is the result. The "primaries" are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet.

LEGAL.—Notice may be given dating from Christmas Day. It is a mistake to suppose that a notice must be given on a quarter day; it may be given any day in the quarter so long as the notice is made to expire at the legal date.

IN A FIX.—A deserter from the army would not be permitted to buy his discharge. As to the punishment of a deserter, that would depend upon the circumstances of the case, and the view taken by the court-martial of any explanation he might have to give.

WANTS TO KNOW.—Certainly it is injurious. It is becoming quite a common habit—the tea-sipping. And, curiously enough, its victims are mostly found among the servant-girl class, who, having the household teacaddy always acceptable, get accustomed to helping themselves from it, a pinch at a time of the dry leaves. These they chew, thus extracting the alkaloid, which is a toxic agent of a most powerful description. Its first effect is an agreeable exhilaration. Ultimately it induces sleeplessness and an abnormal condition of mind, with much severe pain and delirium.

FATH.—An artesian well (so-named from Artois in France) is a well made by boring into the earth till the instrument reaches water which, from internal pressure, flows spontaneously like a fountain—that is, without pumping. Such wells are usually of small diameter and of great depth.

V. N.—Vauxhall Bridge was the work of four different engineers, and was finally finished by Walker, at the expense of a public company. The first stone was laid in 1811, but, owing to a suspension of the works, the whole was not completed till 1816. The cost of the erection was £300,000.

MARY.—A very good plan to keep waxcloth glossy is to wash it with soap or melted glue in the water; but we always think that the best way is to wash it with clean warm water and soap, and dry, then rub over with wax and turpentine. It does not need much, but a cloth with some on it. This keeps it long clean, and makes it very nice.

Bridesmaid.—The origin of the custom of throwing the slipper is uncertain, but it probably is used as an emblem of the renunciation of authority on the part of the bride's guardian, or else is intended as an assault on the bridegroom for carrying off the bride; and if so, is the relic of a very old observance. It is certainly emblematical of luck.

LORD GEORGE.—The horse is specifically mentioned in the Bible in Genesis xlviii, 17. In Job xxxix, 15, there is another reference. All through the Bible from that chapter and verse of Genesis just referred to will be found reference to the horse. The use of horses by the Hebrews was discouraged and it is suggested that the reason of this may be found in Isaiah xlii, 1-3.

J. HAYNES.—Below is a list of the names by which the Larks have been known in the various countries: Fairies, elves, elf-folks, fays, urohins, omphes, elms, eld-women, dwarfs, trolls, hoves, nixes, koses, danades, brownies, kockes, strumkars, fates, wights, undines, nixies, salamanders, gob ins, bogobins, pookes, banishes, kelpies, pixies, peris, djinns, genti and gnomes.

WORKED OVER.—Strong vinegar and the gall of an ox mixed together and rubbed in the joints of a bedstead and cracks where the vermin lurk will kill them; or boil glue and vinegar together, rub as above, and that will destroy them. To prevent them coming again, take strong vinegar and mix with salt, then sprinkle the room with it. It will prevent both bugs and fleas, and is very wholesome in houses. This recipe is contributed by a correspondent, who vouches for its efficacy.

SPOILED FUR.—Turn the drawers and closets over often and shake out everything, and wash shelves to keep down dust. Furs should be thoroughly beaten, then rolled up in brown paper or kept in a tin box or drawer where the parent moth cannot enter. Any strong-smelling thing, like camphor or woodruff or lavender, put in closets or drawers prevents the moth entering, and many people sprinkle pepper round the edges of carpets if the house is to be shut up. But there is nothing like turning things and cupboards over. A good housewife looks over every part of the house once a week.

SIR PHILIP DEMOND.—As you say that your appetite is good, and that you sleep well, we cannot understand why you should be such a sufferer from nervousness and heart trouble. It may be that you unintentionally exaggerate your ailments, or imagine them to be what they are not. If either becomes really serious, we recommend you to consult a physician of experience. In the interim we suggest that you avoid the use of very strong coffee or tea, especially tobacco, if you use it, and partake of food containing much starch and some sugar. Whatever you eat you should be easy of digestion. Be regular in all your habits, and avoid excesses of every kind. Retire to bed at as early an hour as practicable, and rise in the morning at some regular time.

A MYSTERY.—"The nearer the sun the greater the cold," is explained by the sunbeams bringing to the earth both light and heat as they descend to warm the hottest valleys or plains, and passing through the upper strata of the atmosphere, but leaving them always at a temperature much below freezing. This low temp. is proved by the fact that all lofty mountains, even under the equator, are capped with never-melting snow, and that the higher the peaks are, though, therefore the nearer to the sun, the colder they are. Thus aeronautes, in their balloon-cars, if they mounted very high, would be frozen to death if not protected by very warm clothing. Another fact, as stated by the same authority quoted from, is, that "a globe full of cold water, or even a ball of ice, will, in the sun's rays, act as a burning lens."

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